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REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Kuwaiti Speaker Reports Attack by Iraqis

93AE0467A London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
'3 Apr 93 pp 1, 4

[Article by Nasir al-Mutayri]

[Text] Kuwait—Political circles in Kuwait have been preoccupied with the incident of the attack on National Assembly Speaker Ahmad al-Sa'dun in New Delhi while he was attending the International Parliamentary Conference, which opened yesterday.

Al-Sa'dun told AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT upon his return yesterday night that "such a disgraceful act on the part of the Iraqi delegation members is not surprising." Regarding the implications of the incident, he said that "when members of the Iraqi delegation denied that there were Kuwaiti prisoners [in Iraq], I faced them with the facts when I delivered my speech, after which they burst with anger. Shortly after that I felt some commotion near me. I looked back and saw a member of the Iraqi delegation trying to attack me, but the Indian security men intervened just in time."

Kuwaiti Minister of Information Shaykh Sa'ud Nasir al-Sabah expressed to AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT his condemnation and denunciation of the attack. He said the Kuwaiti Government condemns such disgraceful acts, which are contrary to the fundamental principles of democracy and freedom. Shaykh Sa'ud al-Sabah added that he will have consultations with members of the Kuwaiti Government in order to discuss the incident after examining the details prior to adopting an official stand on this matter.

KUNA reported from New Delhi that al-Sa'dun was assaulted while he was delivering his speech at the coordination meeting that was held prior to general meeting of the conference. The Iraqi delegation had failed to convince the Arab countries to endorse the additional draft provision concerning lifting the ban imposed on Iraq. KUNA said the Arab delegations strongly condemned the incident. The head of the UAE [United Arab Emirates] delegation asked that the incident be recorded in the meeting's official minutes. The head of the Syrian delegation did likewise, describing the incident as "barbaric behavior."

In Kuwait, where preparations to receive former U.S. President George Bush were under way, the incident was widely condemned on all the parliamentary, government, and popular levels.

Deputy Nasir al-Sani', member of the Executive Committee of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, denounced the Iraqi action, saying that the Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker is a symbol of the Kuwaiti constitution. He represents Kuwait and its people, and attacking him is an attack on all the sons of Kuwait.

On another level and in reference to the news report published in AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT last Saturday under the headline "Lifting Immunity on Deputy al-Mutayri Threatens a Kuwaiti Parliamentary Crisis." Hamad al-Ju'an, head of the National Assembly legislative committee, said that he made no mention of the possibility of a confrontation taking place between the deputies and the citizens in case the prosecution requests lifting immunity on deputy al-Mutayri. All that he said was that the committee so far received no request to this effect.

It is worth noting that the mistake was due to linking a news analysis to what deputy al-Ju'an said, thus confusing the issue, which, of course, was not intended.

Qatar Denies Mediation Between Iraq, Kuwait

93AE0447B London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
10 Mar 93 p 5

[Article: "Qatar Denies Mediating Between Iraq and Kuwait"]

[Text] Qatar yesterday denied reports that it was mediating between Kuwait and Iraq in order to normalize relations between the countries. The denial was made by the foreign minister, Shaykh Hamad Bin-Jasim Bin-Jabbur Al Thani, who delivered a statement to the Qatari news agency saying that what Qatar had done was a humane gesture of goodwill on the occasion of the arrival of Ramadan and was aimed at seeking the release of Kuwaiti prisoners in Iraq and their return to their families.

Shaykh Hamad said that the Kuwaiti ambassador in Doha had presented a list of names of missing Kuwaitis in response to Qatar's request, but he also stressed that his country was adhering to all Security Council resolutions concerning the Gulf crisis.

Commentary Examines Palestinian-Syrian Differences

93AF0482A London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
30 Mar 93 p 8

[Article by Bilal al-Hasan: "Where Are the PLO-Syrian Differences"]

[Text] On Saturday, 27 March 1993, President Hafiz al-Asad paid a lightning visit to Cairo. On that day, news agencies carried the following report: President Hafiz al-Asad will meet with President Husni Mubarak in order to discuss the deportee problem and Arab participation in the ninth session of the Arab-Israeli negotiations in Washington. President Husni Mubarak will make efforts to arrange for a meeting between al-Asad and Yasir 'Arafat, who will be visiting Cairo at the same time.

The following day, news agencies carried the rest of the news story from Cairo, saying that President Mubarak's

efforts had failed and that the expected meeting between al-Asad and 'Arafat did not take place.

This news item, although simple, is of extreme significance because it reflects the strained relations, or the break, between Damascus and the PLO. This comes at a time when the two parties are participating in the most important and most critical Arab-Israeli negotiations. The strain in relations has its reasons and justifications in the nature of the relations that existed between the two sides during the past 10 years. But for some time there has been a Palestinian trend toward seeing this break in relations end and toward the Palestinian side beginning to build bridges with Damascus because the Palestinian interest dictates it, which by necessity is also Syria's interest.

From a distance, an observer might not perceive that there is a Palestinian-Syrian rift. On necessary occasions, Faruq Qaddummi, head of the PLO Political Department, goes to Syria and holds consultations with Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar'. Sometimes Mahmud Ghunaym (Abu-Mahir), a member of Fatah's Central Committee, also goes to Damascus and holds talks on the question of Fatah's relations with Syria. At other times, Damascus receives a delegation of Fatah allies in the PLO's Executive Committee: Yasir 'Abd-Rabbuh (DFLP [Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine]) and Sulayman al-Najjab (the Communist Party—the People's Party at present). It would appear from these contacts that the lines are open between the two sides, that there are ongoing consultations, and that relations are the best that they can be.

But all this is an outwardly thing.

Observers from close quarters and those with inside information think that this kind of visit merely sustains the break and that the visits take place only for the sake of avoiding blame, but never in order to end the break or improve relations. This calls for further clarification.

A certain trend in Fatah and in the PLO has historically and constantly called for establishing a deep political alliance with Syria. Among the prominent figures adopting this stand are Faruq Qaddumi and Mahmud Ghunaym. Therefore, when any of them visits Damascus, Syria views this as its friends coming to it. But those who are opposed to this friendship are excluded from the delegation's membership. Therefore, the presumed reconciliation lacks its real partners.

But when the DFLP and the Palestinian Communist Party leaders arrive in Damascus, Syria will realize immediately that the talks will be held within their traditional framework and will not touch on the sensitive issues in the relations. It will deal with them just as it deals with any talks taking place with any visiting foreign delegation. Therefore, this kind of contact, despite its outwardly positive look, is far from having the desired influence that would lead to opening a direct channel of contacts between the two antagonistic and differing parties.

Hence, what does Damascus want so that the Palestinian visits will be viewed seriously and so that what is being sought is a real agreement? It wants two things: first, that the visiting delegation from Fatah and the PLO leadership be a first-class leadership delegation that is headed by those who disagree with Syria and, second, that the delegation discusses sensitive issues in depth and aims at reaching a joint alliance.

Naturally, it is unseemly for the Syrian officials to ask for this directly. But as soon as they see that the delegation is not up to the desired standard and that the talks touch on generalities and "consultations and exchanges of views," then the Syrian officials realize that the Palestinians do not want to improve relations with them. They see that Palestinian-Syrian relations cannot be based on consultations and exchanges of views. In their view, these relations should either be relations of alliance or no relations, relations of having a joint plan or nothing at all, or relations of strategic alliance and not relations of just exchanging pleasantries.

Of course, maintaining the status quo and not taking any serious initiative to develop Palestinian-Syrian relations is extremely harmful for both the Syrians and the Palestinians. But the greatest harm falls upon the Palestinians because they are the party that, more than anybody else, needs Arab support for its political stands, in general, and its negotiating stands, in particular.

The Palestinians and the Syrians are the two main parties in the current Arab-Israeli negotiations: the Palestinians because they represent the central cause and the Syrians because they represent the remaining Arab military force, enjoy an advantageous geographical position, and have a central role in the question of water issue, which will emerge as a basic and critical problem in a few months, leading to the success or failure of a settlement. For this reason, the failure to have effective coordination between them is incomprehensible and unjustifiable.

It would suffice here to notice how Israel always tries to play the dividing game between the Syrian stand and the Palestinian stand in order for us to realize the danger of continuing estrangement between them. In order to put pressure on the Palestinians, the U.S. and Israeli media talk about a ready Syrian solution, and in order to put pressure on the Syrians, the media express despair with the Syrians, who are "hostile to peace" and talk about a possible solution with the Palestinians.

What's regrettable about all of this is that many who do not wish good Palestinian-Syrian relations eagerly receive these kinds of media reports and adopt negative stands that deepen the existing rift. A Palestinian-Syrian alliance could develop into pressure on Israel and on all its attempts to evade commitments to the desired political settlement.

So that we will not become advocates of parochial political stands, we must point out that this call for

Syrian-Palestinian reconciliation is totally and objectively justifiable. It stems from the very heart of the issues that have led to the raging conflict between them, particularly since 1983, the year that the rift in the Damascus-sponsored Palestinian camp occurred.

The Palestinian-Syrian conflict centered on three basic issues:

First, the question of Lebanon, where the PLO rejected and opposed Syria's policy there, leading to the camps war, with all its tragedies and bitterness, between 1985 and 1988.

Second, the Palestinian alliance with Iraq during the stage when Iraq was actively against the Syrian regime, whether by carrying out direct operations against the regime or through direct support for General 'Awn in the internal Lebanese conflict.

Third, disagreement over taking part in the internationally proposed political settlement when the Palestinians concluded a Palestinian-Jordanian agreement (11 February 1984) with Egypt's blessing. The two sides carried out intensive contacts with the United States that ended in failure. At that time, Syria was against this policy, and its relations with Egypt were very tense.

What we now see is that these three reasons for the longstanding Syrian-Palestinian disagreement have all disappeared because of the changes that took place on the ground, as well as in the stands of all the parties. The question of Lebanon has been settled as a result of the Palestinian approval of the al-Ta'if agreement and of the fact that the Palestinian alliance with Iraq became devoid of its contents, with Iraq becoming preoccupied with itself and with its problems after the Gulf war, and following General 'Awn's defeat and his departure from Lebanon. As for the disagreement over the [peaceful] settlement, it came to an end, and the Syrian and Palestinian sides have become partners in pursuit of the same political process. Consequently, it can be said that there is no objective justification for the disagreement between Damascus and the PLO. Indeed, practical partnership between them has developed into pressure on both sides to reach a reconciliation that would be of a degree that is proportionate with the weight that each side represents in the political process.

The need for this Palestinian-Syrian reconciliation is not a transitional issue confined to this stage of the negotiations and the difficulties being faced. It is something that needs a broader and more comprehensive outlook. The Arab-Israeli negotiations are still in their beginnings, and future stages involve even greater difficulties. If it is possible to bring international pressure on Israel because of its rejection of the principle of withdrawal and its intransigent stand, it will be easy to condemn it and isolate it. The coming stage of the negotiations will witness this pressure turning toward the Arabs. This is because, in the next phase, the question of normalization will be brought up, as well as the question of joint economic projects and sharing Arab water with Israel, all

of which would concede Arab interests in favor of Israel with international blessing. When this stage of negotiations begins and when international pressures begins to be applied, the Arab parties to the negotiations will need each other more than anything else. They will need support, cooperation, solidarity, and alliance. All of this cannot happen overnight. These qualities will be stronger and more solid if they are the result of long-term alliance that is based on trust combined with daily cooperation.

Obviously it is certain that no Palestinian-Syrian alliance can remain a bilateral alliance. By its nature and by its geopolitics, it is bound to expand in order to include its Arab neighbors, particularly Jordan and Lebanon. It should include all of the effective Arab powers involved in the political process. It should be an alliance in the heart of the Middle East. This is the desired practical alliance, an alliance that will be the point of attraction for the other Arab forces in order to realize parity with Israel—parity that has become difficult to attain in the midst of the world's turbulent developments.

AL-HAYAH Undergoes Self-Analysis

93AE0455B London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 3 Apr 93 p 1

[From "AL-HAYAH's View" column]

[Text] Is AL-HAYAH an independent journal? It is a question we are always asking. We judge ourselves before others judge us, criticize ourselves before others do, check ourselves before others do, and correct ourselves before we are corrected.

We ask this question because the answer is at the heart of the newspaper's policies and its strategy as set out by the present holder of its license in a letter sent to the editor in chief on 24 November 1990, at a time when the Arab nation was divided between supporters and opponents of the acts of the Iraqi regime and its occupation of Kuwait. We would not be giving away a secret now by publishing this document, which may be considered a succinct lesson in the ideal media method and the wise policy that the newspaper must follow—any self-respecting newspaper—in order to enjoy the respect of others. Prince Khalif Bin-Sultan Bin-'Abd-al-'Aziz said, in his letter to the editor in chief:

"Peace upon you, and the mercy and blessings of God."

"The events that our Arab nation is currently experiencing are in their worst days—the fragmentation, division, and hostility among Arab countries and among their people. In order for AL-HAYAH to maintain the standard we aspire to, to bring its message of independence and credibility in the turbulent sea of events—I would like to remind you of the following points to guide you in your work:"

"1. Our concept of journalism and its mission are that it should transmit true and accurate information to readers in as timely a manner as possible, offering scientific

analysis that satisfies individuals' needs according to their educational levels and nonalignment with any particular side, so that no alignment will affect the credibility of the newspaper or its analysis. We want to read accurate, true, unbiased news in its coverage and analysis."

"2. In order to put this concept into practice, in order for the newspaper to occupy a unique and respected standing among the news media, you must select the best writers and the best editors. You must assess articles and news. We do not welcome vilification, convulsions, or fits, nor do we welcome contempt or scorn, nods, winks, or slander, even if all of these are directed at those openly hostile to us."

"3. In order for this newspaper to continue to be Arab, free and independent, you must not accept an item imposed upon you or any financial gift or assistance so that the newspaper will not be captive to any favor or aid. You must never turn away from the principles we set out for you when the newspaper was established or stray from the goals and policies we have made clear to you from the beginning. We want a newspaper respected by people, all people—friends and enemies; a newspaper that above all respects itself, stemming from the respect, values, principles, ethics, knowledge, truth, and clarity of its editorial members."

"4. It is your responsibility to spread the atmosphere of learning and love of research and strive for objective analysis among the editorial family. We flatter no one at the expense of our principles and values, nor do we play the hypocrite in order to gain approval or aid. This must be circulated inside the walls of your newspaper."

"5. Having now mentioned to you the broad policy lines that AL-HAYAH must follow in order not to fall into any error as a result of external pressures, I charge you with the responsibility of implementing this policy, these goals, and what is consistent with our principles and values. For you to avoid any embarrassment in your dealings with officials in any Arab, Islamic, friendly, or hostile country, you must forward whatever they ask of you to us and tell them smartly that you are not authorized to go beyond the broad lines set out for you."

"Please add this letter to the 'Policies, Strategies, and Goals' file, to be a part of our previous correspondence."

"May God grant us success."

"Khalid Bin-Sultan Bin-'Abd-al-'Aziz."

We have read, in a new book about Arab journalism by a university professor and dean of a college of journalism that 86 percent of readers consider AL-HAYAH an "independent" newspaper, that 92 percent say its way of presenting issues and events is "objective," that 90 percent found its standard of media coverage to be "in depth," and that 92 percent felt that the editorial style of the paper was "appealing." We say that AL-HAYAH is a "moderate to conservative" newspaper, and 97 percent

of our readers support us (60 percent said it is moderate, and 37 percent said it is conservative). This is the framework the newspaper's founder gave his all to achieve, and it is the one that the publishing license holder is dedicated to safeguard and strengthen.

The professor-author concludes by saying that AL-HAYAH took the place of another newspaper, adding more readers, and that it is a newspaper with "much neutrality and objectivity," which has adopted a liberal press policy. "Its editors were told, 'Be objective and professional. Be journalists, not politicians.'"

Even so, AL-HAYAH is constantly criticized by those who say it is Lebanese because it was born in Lebanon and carries a Lebanese identification card, those who say it is Saudi because the holder of its publishing license is now Saudi, and those who call it Egyptian because Egyptian news gets the most coverage in it. But we say that AL-HAYAH is an independent Arab paper published in London—as English as the American Herald-Tribune, published in Paris, is French.

AL-HAYAH is a newspaper striving to be objective and professional because the holder of its publishing license and all of its editors insist that it be so and because its reputation is theirs, and they are covetous of it. AL-HAYAH is a purely Arab newspaper, as independent as it can be, as objective as we can make it, in the service of no particular country or person. It will remain Arab and independent, or it will not be at all.

GCC Foreign Ministers Study Iraq, Iran

93AE0455A London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 2 Apr 93 p 4

[Unattributed article: "Gulf Foreign Ministers Today Study 'Iraqi Threats' and Relations With Iran]

[Text] Foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] states are holding their 46th regular meeting this evening, Sunday, in Riyadh, to discuss regional developments and joint Gulf cooperation issues.

The new Council secretary general, Shaykh Fahim Bin-Sultan al-Qasimi, who is taking part in Council meetings for the first time, said that the agenda included the development of the security situation in the Gulf in light of the Iraqi regime's persistent threats to the security and sovereignty of the State of Kuwait, its continued violation of its international borders, and "endangerment of peace and stability in the region." Al-Qasimi added, in a statement circulated in Riyadh, that the working agenda also included the study of a "comprehensive report" on Iraq's compliance with the international resolutions, an exploration of Gulf-Iranian relations, the issue of the UAE's [United Arab Emirates] Iranian-occupied islands, and developments in the Middle East peace process.

The Gulf foreign ministers' meetings are to last two days and include the participation of Shaykh al-Qasimi, who took on the duties of his position early this month

[April]. The topic of renewing GCC Assistant Secretary General Sayf Bin-Hashil al-Muskari or selecting a new secretary is one of the important issues on the agenda. Bahrain proposed, in letters to member states, that the present assistant secretary general be changed, with the aim of "allowing" all of the GCC states the opportunity to apportion the Secretariat General positions. Bahrain nominated its former ambassador to Paris, 'Abd-al-'Aziz Bu-'Ali, to assume al-Muskari's post, while the latter has been renominated by the Sultanate of Oman.

The proposal for al-Muskari to keep his job enjoys the support of Qatar and the UAE, as well as the support of the GCC's new secretary general, Shaykh al-Qasimi, who feels the importance of keeping al-Muskari on as assistant secretary general to review the GCC's various files and issues.

It was learned from Gulf sources that Qatar had sent a message to the Gulf states reaffirming its strong support for al-Muskari's staying in his job, indicating that if he had to be changed, it would nominate its former ambassador to Tunisia and current director of the Arab Department in Qatar's Foreign Ministry, Husayn 'Ali Miftah, to take over the post of assistant secretary general for political affairs.

It was also learned that it was former GCC Secretary General 'Abdallah Ya'qub Bisharah, who sought, before leaving his post last Thursday, to replace al-Muskari, due to what was seen as the conflict between his views and al-Muskari's.

It appears likely to more than one official Gulf source that al-Muskari will keep his job, for several reasons, including:

- The support of the GCC's new secretary general for renewing al-Muskari, due to his need for the latter's expertise in the GCC in the coming period;
- The wish to move beyond the current sensitivity between Qatar and Bahrain because each nominated one of its diplomats to assume the post.

The GCC states are presently unable to find a settlement by giving the post of assistant secretary general for political affairs to Bahrain and the post of assistant secretary general for economic affairs to Qatar because Dr. 'Abdallah al-Quwayz was rehired this past December to remain in his position as assistant secretary general for three more years.

In addition to the topic of renewing al-Muskari, the six Gulf foreign ministers will review, at their meetings, developments in the region, particularly in Iraq. They will examine special reports on the extent of Iraq's implementation of the Security Council resolutions and the actions and contacts recently concluded in this regard.

Gulf observers see no cause for alarm or fear in the Iraqi regime's seeking to establish contacts and relations with other countries, particularly after American and British

assurances and those of the Security Council that the Iraqi regime is still not committed to the United Nations resolutions.

Also in the political arena, the foreign ministers will discuss the results of contacts in the matter of ending the Iranian occupation of the three UAE islands (Tunb al-Kubra, Tunb al-Sughra, and Abu Musa), as well as Iranian-Gulf relations in general. Informed Gulf sources mentioned that contacts with Iran on the UAE's islands are frozen, and that there is nothing new on that front.

The ministerial council is also slated to review developments in the Middle East, activities related to holding a new round of negotiations among the parties, and Israel's recent obstacles to the talks, most recently the issues of the Palestinian deportees and the escalation of repressive measures against the Palestinians.

Incoming GCC Secretary General on Policies

93AE0442A London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
28 Mar 93 p 5

[Interview with Shaykh Fahim al-Qasimi, new secretary general of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council, by 'Abd-al-'Aziz al-Siddiqi and Taj-al-Din 'Abd-al-Haq in Abu Dhabi; date not given]

[Excerpts] Shaykh Fahim Bin-Sultan al-Qasimi, secretary general of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] who arrives in Riyadh today to assume his new duties, expressed hope that he would have the ways and means to expedite the implementation of resolutions by GCC organizations and agencies.

Shaykh Fahim, in his first interview with an Arabic newspaper since his appointment as GCC secretary-general last December, told AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT that the future development of GCC member-states is not a function of form but of the will to turn resolutions into actuality.

The following is the text of the interview:

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] The faith that leaders of the GCC states have in you places grave responsibilities upon your shoulders. How do you envision the job that awaits you, and what are your priorities as you assume your new position?

[Al-Qasimi] The precious trust that the leaders have placed in me is the energy that will spark me and propel me to do my best to drive the GCC course toward wider horizons that will accomplish the hopes and expectations of the region's leaders and people, in particular, and of the Islamic and Arab nations, in general.

First, [the GCC should] focus on implementing the political, economic, and social resolutions that the leaders adopted at previous summits, especially at the recent Abu Dhabi summit.

Second, [the GCC should] scrutinize and identify impediments to the optimum implementation of GCC integration plans and programs in order to resolve them, and it should adopt the necessary mechanisms to surmount them.

Third, [the GCC should] study all of the actions that the GCC secretariat and its various agencies may adopt to serve joint efforts in the Gulf, and it should adjust to accommodate regional and international developments.

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] Do you believe that the current GCC structure gives the secretary general, and the secretariat as a whole, a large enough role to develop council performance in the near future?

[Al-Qasimi] The Cooperation Council has maintained that structure for 12 years and that is but a short span for such a major organization.

During the past decade, the council faced abnormal and extraordinary circumstances, including two destructive wars, and yet it accomplished a great deal in many fields, especially in the area of political and economic coordination.

I do not believe that the future development of the council's role will be as dependent on one structure or another as it will be on the will to translate resolutions into fact. [passage omitted]

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] There are those who believe that GCC activities are divorced in their official framework from the real concerns of the citizens of member-states. What is the way, in your view, to narrow the gap between official agendas and the aspirations of Gulf peoples?

[Al-Qasimi] Citizen concerns in the member-states are not in any way different from the GCC's official concerns. We are all citizens, and we are all in the same boat. It is obvious that the road to collective action and to integration is not easy. It takes concerted study, thorough evaluation, and a balance between sacrifices and gains in order to endow Gulf action with the immunity that would vest it with continuity and [the ability to make a] contribution.

It is natural for the citizens of the GCC states to aspire for more ties and bonds because they heritage, history, and destiny in common, and they share similar systems. There is nothing to prevent any Gulf citizen from contributing to the course of the Gulf through ideas and persuasion.

I would be delighted, in my capacity as secretary general, to be made aware of Gulf citizens' visions and aspirations that would help our course and serve the public interest.

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] Do you expect to create new departments in the GCC secretariat, and do you intend to reevaluate the secretariat's executive and administrative systems?

[Al-Qasimi] I will make that decision after I formally assume my duties. God willing, and when I have familiarized myself with the operations of various secretariat agencies.

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] There are those who advocate the adoption of GCC resolutions by a majority of votes rather than by unanimity. Do you agree with this, and do you think that it will increase the council's effectiveness?

[Al-Qasimi] The current format has been in place since the council's inception because it was found to be more appropriate for joint Gulf action. However, there is no reason why it cannot be amended or modified if the leaders want to do so. The bylaws are not written in stone.

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] What do you think will be the impact of border disputes on the course of the GCC? Do you think it is necessary to establish an independent court system to adjudicate conflicts among member-states?

[Al-Qasimi] Border disputes among nations are natural occurrences throughout the world. Disputes are not rare among neighboring countries, but it is important to keep them from developing into conflicts and crises that would undermine friendly relations. The GCC states are distinguished by the style and manner in which they deal with such issues, thanks to the perception, wisdom, and foresight of the leaders, who have been able to contain [conflicts] and alleviate their impact. We are confident that such a course has helped create a positive climate for dealing with disputes in a familial spirit.

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] There also are those who believe that if the GCC member states consummated their legislative and parliamentary institutions, they would pave the way for the creation of a Gulf parliamentary institution. To what degree can this be accomplished in the near future, and what can such an institution be expected to achieve?

[Al-Qasimi] There is no doubt that the development of legislative institutions in the Gulf states would help raise, and deal with, many issues of interest to citizens of the member-states. Most of them are analogous because Gulf citizens share the same concerns and aspirations. Such institutions, however, are still in their formative and developmental stages in the GCC states and need some time before they can play their targeted domestic roles. Only when they reach that point can we discuss a larger role for those institutions. We are confident that with God's help and with the blessings and encouragement of the leaders, those institutions will be able to play their desired role in the service of the region's countries and their interests.

[AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT] Security is the region's primary concern. How do you view the security challenges that the GCC states face? What options, in your opinion, do these states have in face of those challenges?

[Al-Qasimi] It should be noted that the concept of security has changed from its traditional meaning and has now acquired various dimensions and implications. The concept of security now goes beyond the military dimension to developmental and societal aspects such as the development of natural resources, human growth guided by values based on the teachings of Islam, and building bridges of friendship and cooperation with brothers and friends within a framework of mutual respect and common interests.

The general thrust in dealing with security and military challenges, in my estimation, centers on several points:

- First, bolstering the ability of the region's countries to defend themselves.
- Second, developing the concept of Arab national security in accordance with the Damascus accord of the Arab League Charter.
- Third, commitment to the precepts of international authority, which emphasize respect for the independence and sovereignty of nations, noninterference in their internal affairs and their dominion over their natural resources, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

There is no doubt that challenges are a natural phenomenon common to human history and to international relations. Their acuity increases in climates of changing world conditions where national interests compete and clash.

We, as a vital segment of this world, must learn how to deal with those challenges and how to prepare ourselves for them. [passages omitted]

GCC Prepares To Oppose Western Oil Tax

93AE0442C London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 26 Mar 93 p 11

[Report from Abu Dhabi by Shafiq al-Asadi: "Oman Meeting To Consider Gulf Proposals on Dealing With Western Oil Tax"]

[Excerpts] Oil sources here asserted that Gulf officials are preparing integrated proposals to deal with European and American plans to tax crude oil. The proposals will be submitted to the expanded meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers that will be held in the Sultanate of Oman in April.

The idea of submitting the plan to the Muscat meeting, according to the sources, is to enlarge the circle of rejecting European and American plans to levy a "carbon tax" or "energy tax," which the U.S. administration said it plans to adopt as a revenue measure. [passage omitted]

Observers emphasize that the Jeddah Declaration has been the strongest GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] reaction so far to the proposed taxes on oil.

Gulf sources explained that the Gulf reacted strongly because Gulf leaders felt that the Clinton administration's plans to levy "energy taxes" has bolstered the European Community's position on levying a "carbon tax," which would impact ministerial-level negotiations to be held in Brussels 10 May between the European and Gulf groups.

The sources emphasized that the GCC declaration at the conclusion of the Jeddah meeting, which entailed strong rejection of energy taxes in principle, is a strong base on which the world's oil producers can build a strong position against any actual move by the European Community or the United States toward such taxes, which would be detrimental to all producers, not just the GCC member-states. [passage omitted]

The GCC states, according to the sources, have asserted that all OPEC members should abide by their OPEC production quotas in order to maintain their veracity with other producers at the Muscat meeting and to convince them to support OPEC efforts to shore up prices and oppose energy taxes.

The sources also emphasized that the GCC's stand will also contain proposals for cooperation between producers and consumers in order to generate "clean products" as part of the worldwide trend to protect the environment and as part of an effort to protect oil from being blamed for pollution. [passage omitted].

GCC To Apply Higher Customs Tariff in 1997

93AE0442D London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic 29 Mar 93 p 11

[Report from Abu Dhabi: "Meeting in Dubai Next Month To Prepare Uniform Tariff"]

[Excerpts] The GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] states are set to adopt uniform customs tariffs, ranging from 6 to 8 percent, by 1997, according to economic sources in Abu Dhabi. This means that the GCC states are abandoning earlier plans to adopt a customs tariff that would have ranged from a minimum of 4 percent to a maximum of 20 percent. [passage omitted].

The sources revealed that customs officials in the various GCC states will participate in a coordinating meeting in Dubai next May to discuss a uniform customs tariff in compliance with a resolution adopted by the GCC Supreme Council at its recent Abu Dhabi summit.

At the recent summit, the Supreme Council instructed the GCC Fiscal and Economic Cooperation Committee to draft an integrated customs tariff that will be submitted by the GCC Secretariat at the next GCC summit, which is scheduled for December in Riyadh.

ADFAED Loans Valued at 5.6 Billion Dirhams*93AE0442B London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
28 Mar 93 p 12*

[Report from Abu Dhabi by Taj-al-Din 'Abd-al-Haq: "By End of March ADFAED Loans Amount to 5.6 Billion Dirhams to Arab and Developing Countries"]

[Excerpt] Sources at the Abu Dhabi Fund for Arab Economic Development [ADFAED] estimate that the fund has extended loans amounting to 5.6 billion dirhams by the end of March. This is more than the fund's authorized capital of 4 billion dirhams and is more than double its paid capital of 2.1 billion dirhams.

ADFAED sources said that the fund is negotiating with Arab nations for new loans, but they declined to name those nations or reveal the amount of loans being negotiated. They indicated, however, that agreement on one such loan would be signed shortly.

The sources explained that the fund extended loans totaling 369 million dirhams to finance 26 projects in 13 American states [as published].

Loans amounting to 466 million dirhams were extended to finance more than 100 projects in eight Asian countries.

ADFAED made grants totaling 428 million dirhams and invested 299 million dirhams in joint ventures.

The figures above do not include fund-administered aid offered by the government of Abu Dhabi. [passage omitted]

IRAQ**Military Uprising, Its Implications Analyzed***93AE0417A London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 3 Mar 93
p 10*

[Article by Nabil Yasin: "Overthrow or Change"]

[Text] An idea is spreading in several Iraqi opposition circles concerning the only possibility of changing the regime in Iraq. This possibility is the idea of a military overthrow. The United States is betting on this possibility and is urging opposition forces to accept it.

The concept of relying on a coup includes several desires. The first is to preserve the regime's structure and its social and political nature. The coup would be aimed at toppling the highest political leadership and replacing it with a new military party command that would retain the general directions of domestic and foreign policy with certain modifications. These modifications would be required in order to recognize and to do business with the new leaders. Maintaining the regime's structure would require a commitment to all of the conditions and agreements that the regime has accepted and signed. The

regime (which would not be a new regime in the event of a military coup) would be liable for its obligations and restricted by them.

The thinking behind an overthrow is aimed at retaining the regime's dominant tribal and military nature. It would be useful with regard to domestic policy to keep the Iraqi society divided—the minority governing against the majority and capable of continuing the repression and violation of human rights and of dealing with similar regimes. On the level of foreign policy, the idea of a military coup allows the Army to be used again to confront Iran.

The concept of military overthrow excludes any thought of the possibility of working to overthrow the regime by means of a popular uprising. The coalition forces' position vis-a-vis the March uprising that followed the end of the war clearly supports that. Their position was opposed to a popular uprising in Iraq because, if it succeeded, that would mean the beginning of a new, balance-of-power regime that would be to the advantage of religious forces. This new regime, in that event, would not be committed to the terms and agreements that the present regime signed. Therefore, the war and its results would not be of any benefit. If the war was profit or loss on the military level, it would also be so on the economic and financial levels. Furthermore, profits are expected, if war reparations are paid by Iraq, which would also be the sole, long-term economic loser, just as it was the military loser.

Therefore, the idea of a military overthrow remains the sure guarantee for the coalition because it is the only possible solution that continues the mechanism of obtaining the war's results. It is not for nothing that we find that the "reassurances" alluded to in most of the opposition forces' writings are tantamount to the commitment of "Iraq" in the new regime to the "agreements, Security Council resolutions, and obligations of international charters." However, that does not mean the commitment of the Security Council to other resolutions, such as Resolution 688, which pertains to human rights and renounces oppression and terrorism against citizens inside Iraq. However, the opposition's commitment to that which the regime must be committed does not exclude the idea of a military coup from a priority list of hoped-for possibilities in Iraq, especially because the idea of a military coup forever excludes (if this expression is permissible) the concept of establishing a democratic regime in Iraq. This matter, which now appears to be dead, is unlikely to be on the West's list of priorities, particularly because the opposition has no influence in the Army. Since the beginning of the 1970's, the "dogmatic" Army has been subjected to a long-range policy of purge actions in various forms, based on the principle of no hero in the Army, no permanency in a military post for an extended time, and no commitment to a structured military professionalism, which would give the upper ranks control over the troops they command. This policy changed the military institution into an establishment of secret police, security agencies, each afraid of

the other because each one is subject to monitoring by the other and vice versa. Foreign influence, therefore, also remains moral influence, which might seep into the souls of some officers. An armored brigade could try to encircle Saddam and overthrow the regime, as was made clear in the recent American concept. It is curious that the Americans themselves laughed at this concept right after the end of the war and opted for a direct assassination operation! In these two cases, they expect to reap the results of either of the two possibilities.

Suddenly, a lid has been clamped on whatever armed popular forces there are in Iraq. In the north, in Kurdistan, there are tens of thousands of armed Kurds belonging to the Kurdistan Front, along with other Arab fighting forces, such as the Iraqi Communists. In the south, in the al-Ahwar area, there are also thousands of armed religious forces, including various forces that were isolated by the Iraq-Iran War and the Gulf war. They are forces experienced in long-time field warfare. It is true that the regime, by the way it fought these forces, using a scorched earth policy, human annihilation, and ethnic cleansing, is still more powerful than these armed forces, but the idea of a military coup has dominated all possibilities and has been promoted as the only possible solution!

A legitimate question remains: If the hoped-for military coup occurs, would the coup leaders be quick to invite the opposition forces to assume power and, then, would the coup forces return to their barracks?

If we have any experience, expertise, or realism, the answer would be at most: Certainly not! Soldiers in the Third World are soldiers, i.e., they are the authority. They have the potential to cause a coup. Therefore, they are the power in these two cases. The idea of a military overthrow appears to be a foreign originated idea and not an Iraqi idea, despite the fact that Iraq has a long history of military coups. The first Arab military coup in the 20th Century was Bakr Sidqi's coup in 1936, if we exclude Ahmad 'Arabi's coup in Egypt to the last century.

Military overthrow is the only possible way to avoid a civilian, democratic regime. The civilian, democratic regime is the only way to avoid a military coup regime. However, the second way is stable. The first is unstable and susceptible to another military coup.

Opposition, Constitutional Monarchy Discussed

93AE0416A London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 4 Mar 93
p 10

[Text] In its 15 February 1993 issue, AL-HAYAH published a study on the activity of a current that calls itself the "Iraqi Patriotic [wataniyah] Elements-Advocates of the Constitutional Monarchy Concept." The study spawned numerous communications and reactions regarding this current's importance, its influence in Iraq,

its regional role, the position of Sharif [title of a descendant of Muhammad] 'Ali, and the consensus on Sharif 'Ali as an alternate leader of the Iraqi political opposition.

The first response is by Sharif Muhammad Bin-Faysal I. He objects to the way in which the idea of restoring the monarchy to Iraq was broached and calls for a constitutional monarchy laid down by condition and approved by the Iraqi people in Iraq rather than through outside political pressures.

The second response is by Iraqi writer Nabil Yasin. He completely rejects the idea and stresses that the opposition's goal is to establish a pluralistic, republican state.

We publish these views in the hopes of reaching a conclusion regarding this subject.

The response to the study and opinion of Sharif Muhammad Bin-Faysal I Bin-al-Husayn Bin-'Ali al-Hashim: is as follows:

1. The restoration of the monarchy from a position of political opposition abroad is a mistaken proposition. It reflects a distorted, mistaken picture of reality, whether according to opposition views and perceptions or as an action to sound out the positions of other party and religious forces through a type of propaganda and bargaining to achieve cynical, veiled purposes and objectives that embrace no one.
2. The conditioning of the monarchy's restoration on the fulfillment of "conditions" dictated by the external political opposition, "such as constitutional stipulations...based on its concepts," is categorically rejected, because it is incompatible with the principles of legitimacy and sound democracy. An issue such as this depends on the Iraqi people in Iraq, who interact with all of the factors. The Iraqi people must be the ones to decide on the restoration of legitimacy if they find such action suited to serving the interest of the country and humanity.
- Parties that are capable of fleeing should not be allowed to decide an entire nation's fate. The matter of the Iraqi people and Iraq's future as a homeland and nation do not depend on external powers guided and supported by certain parties having interests and goals in doing so, but on its own sons.
3. The monarchy's return to Iraq cannot be, as some imagine, a "protective umbrella," i.e., a transitional means around which to rally in order to achieve certain goals subsequently. The monarchy in the Faysali period in Iraq was a protective umbrella for everything under the sky of Iraq. It protected Iraq from obstacles, strove for its growth and advancement, and shielded it from catastrophe.
4. The concept now being proposed, which is a negative measure to achieve the positive act of preserving the integrity of Iraq and its people, is intended to widen the rift between individual Iraqis by fomenting conflict and

discord, rending the people's unity, and exhausting its powers. This concept being broached has a political dimension that is being advanced by the parties financing it. Those undertaking this action are unaware of its dimensions. Regardless of whether they themselves achieve any material or other gains in their ambitions, they will ultimately be condemned to remain subservient.

5. As cover and justification for what they are doing to pave the way, the parties making this effort believe that the return of the monarchy to Iraq requires "a careful reading...and political maturity." What political maturity do they want? The Iraqi people is quite aware. Life has taught it much of what others do not learn in their entire lifetime.

This matter also involves another trend, the purchase of consciences, like those who bought the consciences of others. If the Iraqi people wants to make its own decision regarding the restoration of the monarchy and legitimacy, it needs no studies, taming, or maturation.

6. The Hashemite Sharif family is too sublime and exalted in its status to be, as some would have it, a tool, "a platform of deliverance" and a means for achieving personal ambitions. The monarchy's return to Iraq is not to be haggled over as if it were the last arrow in the quiver of some opposition politicians seeking to try their luck with it.

They did not have these orientations before. They adopted them only after they had exhausted every other avenue in their attempts to topple the regime in Iraq and form governments in exile in their meetings in Damascus, Beirut, Arbil, and Washington, because the American Administration's reply to them was clear: "American policy does not support the establishment of a monarchy in Iraq...and prefers the preservation of the Ba'th Party as the ruling institution, with a view toward changing only the head of the regime...."

Opposition members have thus failed in their ambitions to obtain the presidency. Having exhausted all avenues, they have reoriented their policy toward restoring the monarchy based on the attitudes and support of parties hostile to the present Iraqi regime. They failed in their efforts with the countries of the alliance to end the current regime. They have resorted to advancing this idea through their key figures, whom they previously embraced and prepared in their lands with the intent of weakening the Iraqi people in a new war of another type, namely civil strife.

7. The monarchy has its own characteristics and constituent factors. The Hashemite family is above the devious methods and wrangling being used to achieve the return which they are considering. The monarchy is not a pliant, easy tool that bends to the wind. In particular, it does not bend to those who only yesterday helped sweep it away it with a repugnant massacre. When they despaired it, they dismissed it. When they wanted it, they

set it up like a puppet, which is moved according to arbitrary views based on whim and personal opinions....

This is an erroneous approach. It is inconceivable, illogical, and illegal. The monarchy is by definition not a subservient tool. We are not living in the era of al-Mustakfi Bin-Allah the last of the Abbasid caliphs.

8. The return of the monarchy to Iraq is not something decided by opposition members abroad, because each represents his host country's viewpoint. The real opposition is in Iraq. More correctly, it is the entire Iraqi people, with its different groups and classes. It is they who can decide on the monarchy's return to Iraq, with the full backing and support of Arab, national, liberation forces. The advent of the Faysali period in Iraq did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it occurred based on a popular consensus reached through a referendum and the entire Iraqi people's pledge of allegiance to the late King Faysal I. This pledge of allegiance was sanctioned by Arab national liberation elements and forces.

9. A clearly intended contradiction exists in the statement of the group which calls itself the "Iraqi Patriotic Elements-Advocates of the Constitutional Monarchy Concept" with respect to the failure of Iraqi political currents over the past 30 years to unite their efforts in a national strategy to oust the ruling regime. In other words, their primary ulterior motive is to replace the monarchy with another regime. Or, more correctly, they have no wish to maintain the monarchy in Iraq; the monarchy idea is but the final curve in a blocked road. On what basis do members of this group call for the return of the monarchy? What are the articles of this agreement? What are the stipulations which they will dictate to implement these articles? This is where the danger lies.

10. There is a new trend toward a sectarian division as the common denominator of Iraqi political trends. This is incompatible with the national principles and foundations laid down by our late father, King Faysal I. He rejected the sectarian tendency and focused instead on national unity, saying, "All of us are Iraqi citizens." Service and loyalty to the homeland are not restricted to a specific sect or group. The right man is in the right place as long as his intentions are focused on elevating the homeland.

11. The oppositionists abroad aim to distribute posts to themselves under the cover of the monarchy's return as "an emaciated, artificial entity." In other words, they have found in the monarchy the heir to the head of state position which they so bitterly contested among themselves. The return of the monarchy is a transitional phase designed to rally support to achieve power and realize their ambitions. It is a wily, deceptive attempt to contrive a cover that meets with the satisfaction of all the parties and thus ends the competition between them. They have frittered away their efforts and exhausted their energies. These advocates, in their resort to devious and deceptive methods, are lacking in sound judgement.

12. The steadfast Iraqi people in Iraq shall be the ones to decide on the unity of Iraq and the preservation of its land in freedom. They alone have the right to determine their destiny by calling for the monarchy's return to Iraq.

Regarding oppositionists who advocate the constitutional monarchy idea (e.g., academicians, and ulema in particular, who are now calling for the return of the monarchy), are they truly interested in the security of Iraq and the safety of its people? They have not correctly fulfilled their mission of bringing up new generations. They were not dedicated in performing this mission. They chose to immigrate and remain outside the homeland out of fear and a desire to serve their own interests.

13. The history of the monarchy and the Faysali period in Iraq is a history filled with glorious deeds, a snow-white phase. No one can deny that the late King Faysal I played a historical, national role in striving for the liberation of the Arab nations and building a modern state in Iraq.

Therefore, no one can in any way sully this history or seek to degrade it with nefarious ambitions.

The Hashemite family thus remains above these vile actions. We fear for, and caution against, anyone sliding into these labyrinths, under the nominal cover of the monarchy's return, to their own serve goals and ambitions, inasmuch as all Arab national liberation forces reject these bargaining methods and incorrect principles, and they will straighten all that is crooked.

Regional Command Member Salman Interviewed

93AE0441A Baghdad AL-'IRAQ in Arabic 22 Feb 93
p 2

[Article by AL-'IRAQ correspondent: "The Will of the Men has Foiled All of the Enemies' Plots Against the Triumphant March of Our People"]

[Text] AL-'IRAQ met with Comrade Radi Hasan Salman, member of the Iraq Regional Command in charge of organizations of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in the Babil, Karbala', and al-Najaf Governorates, to shed some light on the desire of the party organizations, tribes, and masses in these governorates to defend great Iraq, its sovereignty, and its honor. He said:

The Leader and the Masses

The nobility of our people shines. It has been embodied by long years of resisting the plots of colonialism and Zionism, and this image shines with the presence of the leader, who is able to take the hand of the masses and lead them toward policies of glory, pride, and victory.

Thus the presence of President Commander Saddam Husayn in leading the course of great Iraq, the revolutionary steps to achieve the image of noble Arab rebirth, and the steadfastness against all tricks and treachery have foiled the ambitions to divide up our nation and plunder its wealth, provoking those enemies and those

who plot in the swamp of hatred and filth to regather their scattered elements to plot against the destiny of this combatant people. But they achieved what their sick souls wanted, the sewer-like dreams of their sick imagination. After their aggression failed in the Mother of Battles and the chapter of perfidy and treason, they came back once again, disappointed, to attack Iraq again, with flimsy pretexts, but they were blinded by hatred to the Iraqis' continued might and steadfastness, and their heartfelt rallying around the unique Commander, the President Commander Saddam Husayn, and [his] increasing projects of goodness and generosity despite our enemies' unjust embargo.

The Nobility of the Iraqis

When our enemies escalated to their position calling for aggression, and after they bombed some of our industrial installations and populated areas, our noble people showed their steel. From the first hours of the aggression, they came hurrying to [Ba'th] Party offices for their guns to join those of the party organization men, the tribes, and the masses to resist every traitorous attack. The streets and public places of every region were crowded with large numbers of fighters awaiting the signal to carry out their missions, not intimidated by all of the voices of treason.

That situation also sorted out for us positive attitudes that expressed the alertness of the masses, which played a part in withstanding the efforts of some misled people to fool with the citizens' property, to harm their security and stability, and arresting them.

The Guardians of the People

The direction and attention of President Commander Saddam Husayn in the Guardians of the People project, was an effective sphere that embodied the shining image of the Ba'th fighters and all of the good citizens in achieving the revolutionary objectives of this project, effective participation in all those who prostituted themselves to harm the citizens' security and stability. Citizens expressed their happiness with this project, whose dimensions serving the citizens are clear.

Thus is the image before us in our visits and meetings with numerous citizens in the Governorates of Babil, Karbala', and al-Najaf and the true enthusiasm and preparedness, combined with faith and loyalty to the great Commander Saddam Husayn, which reflected the truth, strength, and will of Iraq and its readiness to defend our nation under the slogan "God is great," which will remain, God willing, a victorious banner in the hand of our valiant Commander Saddam Husayn.

Our Victory is Assured

The Iraqis today are actually competing to fulfill the saying of their commander, Saddam Husayn: "Iraq is the homeland of all, and protecting its security and sovereignty is the responsibility of all." These days have proven that, and so it is the right of our people to live

under the sun, as the mother of the world, the Iraq of civilizations and of Saddam Husayn, the Iraq of miracles. The best proof of that is the Saddam River and what the Iraqis' hands and continued efforts have achieved on the two-tier al-Qa'id [Commander] Bridge, the Saddam Tower, and giant projects embodying the uniqueness and the ability of this noble people to bear up under hardships and triumph over them.

Era of Iraq's Great Leader

Comrade Radi Hasan Salman pledged to the president commander, in the name of the party organizations, tribes, and masses of the Babil, Karbala', and al-Najaf Governorates, to continue down the road of building and civilization in every vital institution and to awaken every noble Arab ambition to bear the weapons of faith and might, to thwart all the imperialist and Zionist plots against our people, to protect its unity, and to preserve its honor and resources.

Ba'thist Farah on Threat to Arab Nation

93AE0439A Baghdad ALIF BA' in Arabic 3 Mar 93
pp 10-11

[Interview with Dr. Iliyas Farah, member of the national command of the Arab Socialist Ba'th party, by unnamed correspondent; place and date not given: "The Democracy and Unity Dimensions Are Twins"]

[Text] Dr. Iliyas Farah is a member of the national command of the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party. He is from the generation of strugglers and thinkers that helped to organize the Arab National Movement and formulate its pan-Arab path. We met with him for an interview, and he spoke to us of the challenges that the Arab nation faces, and of attempts to fracture the Arabs' cultural identity. He said, "We are interested in what unites the nation culturally, which is cultural awareness. That is central. If the factors assisting that are related to democracy, socialism, and Arab unity, so we must affirm these dimensions, but the first and basic launching point is in first of all affirming the existence of the nation. The real and living existence of the Arab nation today can only be sought in its struggle against the nation's challenges—the struggle dedicated to the nation's truth—that is to say, its existence in history and its spiritual, militant, intellectual, and cultural heritage and its current meanings in facing the challenges of cultural survival. Thus the scientific understanding of the truth of the nation, at this time, springs chiefly from the internal contradictions of its reality, and secondly, defining its external challenges."

"The internal challenges," Farah added, "are fragmentation, backwardness, dependency, class exploitation—now at the pan-Arab level, and the confiscation of the nation's wealth in a country that is being turned into class separated from the interests of the nation and the masses."

"These are the contradictions that reveal the extent of the crisis between the nation's truth and its reality, became the nation is a state of facing threats to its existence, and it cannot face these challenges and triumph over them in its socially and culturally contradiction state of division, backwardness, and dependency."

"The confrontation has to do with emerging from this reality with historically combatant attitudes that express the soul of the nation and its sole cultural truth, that in the past expressed a material and spiritual balance. This kind of militant spirit must create for itself a climate that fortifies it against the influence of the contradictions present in current Arab reality. This climate must by its very nature be one of unity and democracy to combine the profound contact with the soul of the nation, expressing its nobility on one hand and the spirit of the age and the achievements of modern civilization on the other. The connection between the unitary, democratic, and socialist dimensions is the guarantee of the nation's success in confronting the challenges of the present day. Any consideration of democracy, unity, or socialism in isolation from this unity is partial, and devoid of effectiveness. Thus we need, in these times, to reconsider the unitary, socialist, and democratic concepts through a deep understanding of the present era. When our survival is threatened at this level of danger, it must be faced with all the nation's energies; so the democracy and unitary dimensions are inseparable twins, with each influencing the other."

[ALIF BA'] Does that mean that we cannot achieve democracy before unity?

[Farah] If we are speaking objectively and scientifically of unity at this stage, that means an objective and democratic dialogue among all the combatant forces in the nation. In addition, when we speak of democracy and pluralism and of the organic connection between the masses and their combatant vanguards, we are unable to speak of democracy as a theory, as an experiment carried out in other cultural contexts. We are speaking of democracy as essential for salvation, a vital necessity for the nation to rise, for the masses to have a direct role in making political decisions and the role of the vanguards in enhancing awareness of democracy, and assimilated understanding with its role as a weapon in the fight for cultural survival. Additionally, when we speak of socialism, we are not speaking of theories detached from the scene of direct action in the life of the contemporary world. We are speaking of a need to be saved, a need derived from the nature of the battle the nation has been fighting since our modern resurgence. At the same time, we are speaking of the spirit of the age, the spirit of the revolution, the spirit of justice and freedom, because as the nation rises again, it must embody human cultural striving, comprehensively human, in order to be assimilated with itself as a nation with a message. Thus the slogans in use today relating to democracy, unity, or socialism must not stop at limits or individuals, parties, and forces active in national and pan-Arab life in order to increase participation in political life and in leading

the existing systems. We must speak of democracy as an objective need required by the nature of the nation's combatant phase, and linking democracy to a horizon [text illegible] from the view of the nation itself and its future. It goes beyond the narrow framework of the country system, the party organization, and the leading role of individuals in expressing the nation's needs for revival.

[ALIF BA'] Don't you think that the inner state of Arab governments and of Arab parties and powers indicate their inability to carry out these tasks at the pan-Arab level, and that their role in the last 10 years has not been effective on the Arab scene?

[Farah] First of all, I would like to state a fact that we must not forget and that we must deal with daily: the fact that the remains of the negative phases that have taken place have left the Arab regimes, and even sectors of the masses and factions of the Arab intelligentsia, in a state of complacency—of self-complacency.

This situation has brought about a kind of estrangement from the truth of the nation, to a capitulation to the course planned for us: settlements and liquidations of fateful Arab issues. The most dangerous thing about this complacency is that some generation, country, or party might put obstacles in the way of the nation's destiny, its courses and its future. This is why I believe that the principled stand of the Mother of Battles in directly confronting these courses and the plots behind them came at a time when the Arab nation had almost despaired of itself, given the state of collapsed values it had come to, and in a historic crisis, the Mother of Battles was a historic spectacle of mega-confrontation between the nation and the enemies of its cultural destiny. It appears today as a new challenge for the nation, a positive challenge to confront negative challenges, threatening our cultural salvation, which took the form of a cry to the consciences of strugglers throughout the Arab world to embody the spirit of this new resurgence. Since 1985, when the Palestinian camps in Lebanon were subjected to those well-known massacres, due to the lack of any real reaction, our Comrade Commander Founder [Michel 'Aflaq], God rest his soul, drew the following inference: that all the political parties and powers in the Arab nation had ended up in a dead end, and that they would be able to get out of their dark tunnel to the path of contemporary Arab resurgence only by acting at the historic level. That is why he sounded his call to all the powers in the Arab nation, to intellectuals and struggles, to engage in future action with the aim of renewing nationalist thought and giving a new historical launching base to Arab action and the nationalist struggle in this phase. As a result of this came dialogue that lasted until 1989, the year in which Michel 'Aflaq died. I was one of those who answered that call. The dialogue was very profound, with political and philosophical dimensions, and led to practical courses to offer the Arab masses. There was a feeling that the Arab condition, which had reached a degree of decline, was in

need of a greater deed than had ever been contemplated in profoundly democratic sessions and dialogue.

There was a feeling that the nation was in need of a historic stand, and thus the Mother of Battles came along as an embodiment of this wish, not just the need. I believe that that historic undertaking was still open to all those who still carry the cause of their nations in their hearts, because the cause of saving the nation called for—with its overwhelming scientific, military, technological, organizational, and financial challenges—a new spirit, new awareness, and new action. The Mother of Battles came along to indicate these needs and levels. The most valuable thing about the present historic moment is the feeling of the masses that their cause has begun to return to them, but coming back to them and getting out of political backrooms, out of the traditional maneuvers and tricks that revolutionary action outstripped. There must be a struggle with the self to transcend the focusing on the self that obscures, at the social and political levels, the phenomenon of focusing on the self with the psychological level, the phase associated with childhood. Children do not attain reason until they have passed beyond this obsession with the self and the phase of maturity in understanding objective relationships with others.

Therefore, at the national level, it is possible for combatant forces to confirm their attainment of the age of political and nationalist maturity only by true democratic action that raises everyone to the level of the cause, and helps to form plans integrated in their strategic, intellectual, political, combatant, and social dimensions. We Arabs are at the beginning of the twentieth century, comparing what occurred in the nineteenth century.

At a conference in 1897, the ideological, political, and intellectual tendencies of the Zionist movement transcended themselves, and became a part of the Zionist plan. At that time, pluralism, in formula or reality, turned all the factions into a formula of integrated unity, and at that point history began to offer gifts to that unity, with historical rhythms. Twenty years later, in 1917, came Balfour's promise. Thirty years later, in 1947, the decision to partition Palestine; then 1967, what happened in Egypt; then Camp David in 1977-78. So the Arabs may learn this theoretical and practical lesson; it is a lesson applicable to all the movements in history, particularly to the Arab nation and its past and present experiences.

Success is conditional on unity, and the condition for the message is unity. The historic opportunity today is expressing itself as a cry for unity, in the context of democratic formulas that turn the issue into unity of goal and destiny. Thus the dialogues and debates happening today and the affection among the forces that have maintained their principles is the beginning. It is a realistic and local response that must evolve even more. The era now has a share of gratitude for the possibility to move these beginnings in the direction of clearing a new

path for the nation in compliance with the call sounded by the Mother of Battles for the unity of the Arab struggle, for blazing a trail of unity and democracy, amidst the fateful challenges surrounding our nation. Only then will history grant us the success we deserve, if we dedicate ourselves to its cultural call.

Al-Muhajir of Arab Economists Union on Iraq

93AE0443A Baghdad ALIF BA' in Arabic 24 Feb 93
p 12

[Interview with Dr. Muhammad al-Muhajir, assistant secretary general of the Arab Economists Union and an expert at the Arab League's Arab Statistics Center, by Isma'il 'Isa; place and date not given]

[Text] Dr. Muhammad al-Muhajir, a political figure in Lebanon, is currently the assistant secretary-general of the Arab Economists Union. He is also an expert in the Arab League's Arab Statistics Center.

ALIF BA' interviewed him when he visited Iraq to participate in an international conceptual conference held in Baghdad recently as part of the activities of the Mother of Battles Festival. The following is the text of the interview:

['Isa] Many consider the international changes which dominated the political scene in 1990 to have been a strong motivation for the outbreak of the war in 1991. How do you link these international changes with the economic impetuses to explain how the war erupted with such amazing speed and the unreal hostile concentration?

[Al-Muhajir] We cannot impose a separation between all of the changes and factors. We can treat them [as a totality] to understand their development. A separation would detract from our understanding of their effects. These factors are intermeshed. They touch on the structure of the Arab reality in its relations with the West primarily. The current Arab reality is closely tied to the historical development and intermeshing of international orders, the formation of centers of international influence—i.e. the NATO countries—which necessarily develop at the expense of other countries, the division of the Arab world resulting from the colonial period, the excessive dependency after World War II, and faulty or wanting political and economic decision-making. What I mean is that economic, cultural, political, and factors intermesh to form these orders.

['Isa] Dr. al-Muhajir moves on to address the emergence of an international conflict of interests between Europe and the United States:

[Al-Muhajir] Following the post-World War II growth of the bipolar order—with the dissolution of the socialist camp, the breakup of the Soviet Union itself, the emergence of a global economic power in Europe that is moving quickly toward unification, Japan's emergence as an economic power, and the absence of ideological

conflict—the situation is no longer suited to the continuation of a Western strategy that provides for a long reach or the West's hegemony, as was the case previously, at least economically. What I mean is that most of these changes have perforce created a conflict of interests between Europe and America, which had been allies.

If Europe is able to proceed according to the [unification] charter and applies customs protection and reciprocity, it will greatly damage its companies [read U.S. companies] in America, which is now suffering from a balance of payments shortfall of \$300 billion. Also, the international monetary system that developed after World War II pursuant to the Bretton Woods Agreement no longer suits or benefits the United States. In addition, the end of Europe's fear of the socialist camp affects Europe's relations with America vis-a-vis the World War II program, which gave America a free hand in Europe. All of these factors point to the potential for a clash between the United States and Europe, a clash which will strengthen Europe and damage the United States.

['Isa] Dr. al-Muhajir addresses the power vacuum in the Gulf:

[Al-Muhajir] The use of oil in the American strategy to subjugate and dominate has been formulated publicly in statements and can be seen in the frantic effort [entailed by Desert Storm] and in U.S. relations with Gulf entities. All of this points to an active attempt to gain control of the oil sources. The American strategy has been assisted in this by a host of supporting factors, including the power vacuum in the Gulf and the current ruling regimes in the Gulf, which, given their composition and breakdown, are certainly devoid of power and can only be part of a Western alliance. The second part of America's strategy is to implant and maintain the Zionist entity in order to undermine the region and place it under constant domination. Iraq continuously negates all of these factors. Iraq negates the power vacuum in the Gulf. Iraq is creating a new type of relations supported by oil power to build a new, technological model.

['Isa] We are thus given to understand that economic factors were the main motivations for the Gulf war, but are not the only motivations, as is apparent based on a reading of the north-south struggle and north-south relations.

[Al-Muhajir] I said that the economic impetus cannot be separated from the other impetuses, due to the intermeshing between northern and southern cultural, economic, and—in particular—political structures. Any political decision has a large economic component. Politics, it is said, is concentrated economics. The intermeshing of these factors necessitates the formation of this picture. The economic factor carries more weight compared to other factors. But the role of the other factors should not be denied. They are organically intermeshed with the economic factor. They all combine to form the ensemble of impetuses.

[Isa] Was the aggression therefore a response to Iraq's attempt to effect an equitable distribution of resources and to thwart the plan to exploit the Gulf Arabs?

[Al-Muhajir] Iraq has been pursuing a cultural plan based on a scientific-technical program, intellectual confluences, a national vision, a just analysis, and the establishment of balanced relations with the countries of the world. The Gulf countries, or the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] in its current form, might be classified as improbable. For example, if the GCC is intended to advance development and unification, the factors motivating it are very weak or nonexistent. If it is intended as a move toward separatism, its motivating factors are numerous, be they the separatist model of production followed in the Gulf as a means of control, or the detachment of producers from the terms of their production, or the cutting off of the Arab demographic depth from performing its role in the Gulf. Or is the GCC merely a Western ally protecting the interests of the group in power by fulfilling functions vis-a-vis the West? Therefore, in its present form, the GCC must inevitably clash with the cultural plan pursued by Iraq. Is Iraq on the offensive? No, that is incorrect. Iraq was developing its cultural plan, which was at odds with them. There was a conspiracy on the part of the other side, and Iraq was repelling the constant danger, which was used in the Gulf as a warhead in the aggression against Iraq.

[Isa] Could you define the most salient economic factors that paved the way for the outbreak of war? What is the economic factor or motive that led to America's entry into war? Will Arab oil remain the source of imperialist wars against our Arab homeland?

[Al-Muhajir] As the basis for analysis, the use of oil in the process of international subjugation is a strong motive. In other words, Iraq's battle, in my view, is not a local or regional battle. Its dimensions are not only national, but extend to humanity. Europe was led to enter the war by its fear that America would gain sole control over the oil. Therefore, it entered as a partner to maintain the oil flow and to guarantee that oil would not be used as a weapon to subjugate it in the coming struggle.

Economists Discuss Plans for Post-Boycott Era

93AF0444A Baghdad ALIF BA' in Arabic 24 Feb 93 p 8

[Article by Shamil 'Abd-al-Qadir: "500 Economists Submit Solutions"]

[Text] More than 500 economists and specialists in the fields of finance, agriculture, oil, and industry attended the eighth Scientific Conference of the Iraqi Economists Association. The three-day conference discussed and analyzed about 50 valuable papers. ALIF BA' attended the conference, which deserves the name that was given to it by the participants: "The Conference on the Future of the Flourishing Iraqi Economy".

Our colleague Mizban Khadr Hadi summarized his impressions of the practical and factual conclusions of the conference, saying: "Under the direction of President Saddam Husayn, may God keep him, the eighth Scientific Conference was held. It was a scientific gathering of a large number of specialists concerned with the economic issues, whether in the universities or in the government, concerned with realizing the slogan of the conference, which was 'Iraqi economic policy under the conditions of the economic blockade and its future.' We are confident that the recommendations and resolutions of the conference will enhance our economy."

In the conference halls, ALIF BA' met with different specialists who gave a democratic, frank, and effective flavor to the conference, presented their courageous and critical ideas, and submitted solutions, useful ideas, and recommendations to develop the Iraqi economy under the conditions of the unjust economic blockade.

Dr. Sa'd Muhammad 'Uthman, professor of economic theory at al-Mustansiriyah University said that the conference was held in extraordinary conditions. During the three days, participants discussed different ideas in agriculture, industry, oil, and financial and monetary matters. The participants included the ministers of trade, agriculture, and industry, as well as well-known leaders in economics and finance, university professors, and government officials. In spite of the different affiliations, all of the participants shared their experiences in an attempt to develop and strengthen the Iraqi economy in the face of the unjust economic blockade. He added that many countries have faced serious problems, but they are less complicated than what Iraq is going through. An example is Germany, which experienced high inflation and currency devaluation in the early 1920's. During that period, the mark was being devalued practically every hour.

Dr. Sulayman Zidan said that the conference attempted to answer an important and basic question: "What would have happened if Iraq was not an oil-producing country?"

Dr. Taqi 'Abd Salim al-'Ani, professor of international economics and foreign trade, said that it is a well-known fact that the Iraqi economy has a very solid basis as it is a diversified economy that depends on agriculture, industry, and oil. "Unfortunately we forced our economy to depend on oil as a basic export commodity for a long time because oil constituted 97 percent of our exports. The directives of our leadership to encourage the agriculture sector and to raise the prices of agricultural products and to encourage the industrial production had very positive effects." Al-'Ani also quoted Henry Kissinger, who said in 1973 that "the Arabs can use oil as a weapon, and we can use food as a weapon." On this basis, we are doing our best to realize food sufficiency in order to save the coming generations from any threats.

The minister of agriculture had his own opinion, which he frankly explained to ALIF BA' after the session he attended and was devoted to discussing the agricultural sector.

He said that many of the ideas were theories that did not take into account the realities of the agriculture sector or did not have a clear idea of the factual and substantive practices in the agricultural sector. "We would be better served by the actual practices and experiments than by mere academic theories, especially because many of the ideas had nothing to do with reality. What we need is to realize self-sufficiency and food security."

Tawfiq al-Yawir, chairman of the Iraqi Economists Association, said, "We are looking forward to having practical and factual ideas, solutions, and recommendations from this large gathering of economists. Some of these people have different views, but they are all trying to use their experiences to serve the Iraqi economy as a result of the speech by President Saddam Husayn, may God keep him, who said, 'The time has come to activate our economy on the basis of our domestic capabilities and to arrange it in a correct manner.'" [part of original text missing]

The second part dealt with the future paths of the socialist industrial sector and the proposals for the post-blockade era, as well as the proposals for the structure of the private sector.

During the session on the oil sector, Dr. 'Ahmad Husayn al-Hiti from al-Mawsil University, said that any dispute with the neighboring countries will have very adverse effects to the Iraq pipelines that go through the neighboring countries.

According to him, the solution is to link these countries to Iraq in the oil industry in nontraditional ways, such as the establishment of joint public companies to build oil-product distribution centers. He added that it would not be enough for Iraq to provide the neighboring countries with facilities and refineries at the loading ports either for free or for very low prices. "The citizens of the neighboring countries should feel that they are partners with Iraq. It is also possible to establish companies to transport the joint oil products between Iraq and the neighboring countries according to new formulas other than those of the pipelines. He also added that the oil industries are still very traditional. For example, the refineries are still vacuum refineries, while other, advanced refineries have been developed. Advancement in refining procedures would give us better products, which would enable us to compete in the international market.

Basic Provision Prices Subsidized at 98 Percent

93AE0430A Baghdad AL-JUMHURIYAH in Arabic
6 Mar 93 pp 2, 8

[Article by Salah al-'Abd: "Minister of Trade: 98 Percent Government Subsidies to Basic Provisions"]

[Text] The government is subsidizing the flour and basic provisions distributed to the people via ration cards by as much as 98 percent. Minister of Trade Muhammad Mahdi Salih, said that the subsidy given monthly by the government to these provisions is a reflection of the government's responsibility to provide food to the people. He added that the ministry had established a special price subsidy fund to strike a balance between the items subsidized by the government and those that are sold for a marginal profit. This means that the profit gained from selling some items is used to pay for the subsidy of other items. This is done to secure the basic provisions and insure their availability on the markets particularly during the present unjust blockade imposed on Iraq.

The minister said that the government is providing 6 million 50 kg bags of basic provisions monthly. He also mentioned plans and programs developed by the government to continue its activities aiming at ensuring that the citizens will have food even after the blockade is lifted. The most important of these plans are retaining the system of the ration cards after reconsidering the quantities of the quotas in order to avoid any cases of monopoly that such food items would be subjected to and to prevent them from being smuggled to the neighboring countries, particularly because food prices in Iraq are very low compared to those in other countries. The minister added that the value of the Iraqi dinar will inevitably rise for many reasons and considerations, among them the ability of the domestic businesses to accomplish the building and construction activities in a self-sufficient manner without any need to import materials from abroad. This is in addition to the cases of great development being witnessed in the fields of industry, agriculture, and other services in the country that will participate in providing alternate goods and commodities to the imported ones, which will result in saving foreign currency and improvement in the situation of the Iraqi national economy, which will have significant effects in raising the exchange rate of the Iraqi dinar.

Answering a question of the possibility of depending on the current national grain production in meeting the needs of the citizens and achieving self sufficiency for these goods without the need to import them, the minister said that the government is currently supplying 19.5 million citizens with their food and flour quotas, an undertaking that requires maximum efforts to secure the necessary quantities of these goods in order to distribute them fairly and equally to all the families especially that the full capacities of the al-Dawrah silo is enough for storing a 12-day supply and bearing in mind that the combined capacities of the silos at al-Dawrah, al-Taji, and (al-Utafiyah) are barely enough for a month's supply of bread. Based upon these facts it is not an easy task for the government to undertake to shoulder the responsibility of providing food for everybody. On the contrary, it is a difficult and complicated mission that requires extraordinary efforts on the part of the responsible authorities, especially because the current national grain

production will not cover the needs of all of the people. This means that additional quantities will have to be imported and distributed fairly among the people. The minister expressed his hope that agricultural production will increase in the future in tandem with an expansion in industrial production and in the production of food provisions and other essential commodities in a way that would lead to a high degree of self-sufficiency in these goods and would lead to Iraq being able to stop importing these goods against huge quantities of foreign currency, which burdens the national economy. He said that distributing one chicken for every family in Iraq costs \$4 million and distributing a quarter of meat for everybody costs \$10 million. The cost of distributing the additional three quotas of lentils during the last two months was 500 million dinars, and the cost of the quota of beans was 126 million dinars. This indicates the volume of subsidies and losses incurred by the government for providing the people with these materials.

Customs Official Interviewed on Food Situation

93AE0435B Baghdad AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI
in Arabic 27 Feb 93 pp 1, 7

[Interview with Bastam al-Janabi by unnamed correspondent; place and date not given: "We Have Taken Several Steps To Facilitate the Inflow of Imported Foodstuffs to the Local Market"]

[Text] AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI conducted the following interview with Bastam al-Janabi, director general of the Customs Authority, in which the role of customs in facilitating the reception of foodstuffs arriving from abroad, the measures taken to combat all methods of smuggling, and the extent of cooperation between Customs and its auxiliary bodies at border points of entry were discussed.

[AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI] What is your assessment of Customs' current role?

[Al-Janabi] The Customs Administration plays an important role in the nation's economic subsistence, in the financial and trade plans manifested in the implementation of related laws and guidelines that are in force, in bolstering of the national economy by means of financial aid, and the implementation of bi- and multi-lateral agreements between Iraq and other Arab nations, as well as other nations.

The Customs Authority's domain encompasses the entire nation, starting at the first border post and ending with the unloading site and the local markets. In the shadow of prevailing circumstances, which have resulted as a consequence of the 30-nation assault and the unjust economic blockade, the Customs Administration plays an important and vital role in the nation's political and economic policy through the undertaking of all procedures needed to implement economic plans and guidelines, especially the timely implementation of the new import program and prevention of the entry of those goods whose importation is prohibited, and facilitating

the finalization of all customs transactions with the aim of hastening the flow of basic imported goods and items into the local markets.

Moreover, it plays an important role in combatting all forms of smuggling in all parts of the nation, and protection of nation and society from the negative consequences of this phenomenon. This is especially important now under the conditions of the blockade because the need for basic consumer goods and raw materials for use in local industry has increased.

[AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI] What measures have been taken to facilitate customs procedures related to imported foodstuffs?

[Al-Janabi] The Customs Authority has taken a number of measures in this regard. During the period of the 30-nation assault and in response to the conditions prevalent at the time, the Customs Law was suspended on 9 February 1991, with the objective of promoting imports and facilitating the entry of goods and merchandise without need for customs procedures. The Customs Law was reactivated on 8 August 1991, by order of the Revolution Command Council.

The preceding directive allowed for the importation of basic foodstuffs, industrial and agricultural production needs, construction materials, and manufactured automobiles without import licenses, customs fees, or any other types of fees. Additionally, importers were temporarily exempt from commercial inventories and foodstuff certificates of origin, and the clearance time was reduced.

Concerning coordination with other, related offices, a number of procedures have been adopted to simplify customs work, namely coordination with health, agriculture, standardization, and quality control offices due to the need for the presence of their representatives at the border customs offices and points of entry to conduct the required examinations and analyses and the timely submission of the results of these examinations. This procedure was adopted to hasten the finalization of customs transactions and to facilitate verification. To this end, joint committees were formed, and mechanization was employed at customs offices and border points of entry. The purpose of the preceding measures, as mentioned earlier, is reduction of time, effort, and transaction follow-up time—hence, a speedy conclusion of transactions at a single location. Such a method was adopted at border points of entry and within other departments, i.e., the vehicle department.

Moreover, coordination with overland transport offices was accomplished through the adoption of unified sequential numbers for bills of lading presented at the borders, for amendments to these bills, and for methods of lading. A lot suited for the stoppage of trucks carrying foodstuffs has been earmarked to facilitate inspection procedures and sample removal. A specialized committee, called the "Immediate Inspection Committee," has been formed to conduct inspections on truck beds in

the lot without needing the trucks to unload their cargo in warehouses. This reduces congestions and speeds up transaction follow-up time so that goods can get to local markets.

In conformity with guidelines on facilitating the passage of goods that are exempt from customs fees and import restrictions, especially basic foodstuffs, the customs offices at border points of entry were instructed to approve the bill of lading as the basis for completing documentation. On this bill are affixed the customs inspection statement, health authorities stamp, and the goods' owner's confirmation of having received them. Also, approval was granted for the declaration of shipments of goods that arrive under different bills of lading and are among the rationed items under a single permit when such goods are of a given classification for the importer in question and for the duration of the economic blockade.

On the other hand, border points of entry have not been neglected. Attention has been granted the appropriate spatial configuration, work flow, separation of entry and exit traffic, detailed attention to departmental organization, and support of these border points of entry with qualified customs personnel in order to hasten performance and prevent the accumulation of trucks in such points of entry as Tirbil, Fa'idah, Filfayl, and al-Mundhiriyyah. Moreover, attention has been focused on the organization of the three customs departments and the allocation of work therein, with the objective of speedy completion of transactions and the arrival of materials and goods to citizens' consumer outlets.

[AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI] What measures have you adopted to curtail smuggling?

[Al-Janabi] Several measures have been taken to counter this phenomenon, including intensive training seminars for customs personnel in the prevention of artifact- and drug-smuggling, granting of generous motivational awards to employees who confiscate smuggled goods, assignment of competent employees to border points of entry, and their continual rotation and replacement. However, due to the prevailing circumstances, the acquisition of sophisticated antismuggling devices has been put on hold for awhile.

Computers have been utilized at border posts to monitor the movement of trucks and vehicles, the incidence of document and record falsification and fraud, and the thwarting of many a smuggling attempt.

[AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI] Would you place a numerical value on the goods that have been confiscated during the last two years?

[Al-Janabi] It may be said that in 1992 the rate of confiscated goods was at least several times that of 1991. [end al-Janabi]

Regarding the nonavailability of services at the al-Qadisiyah Center at Tirbil, specifically covered areas at

passenger-inspection locations and water, and whether these problems will be alleviated, al-Janabi pointed out that the center's commanders are intent on providing services to both passengers and employees. The construction of covered areas at passenger inspection locations and joisted scales has begun. He also expressed hope that the authorities would work toward providing water at the center.

Head of Chamber of Commerce Interviewed

93AE0435A Baghdad AL-'IRAQ AL-IQTISADI
in Arabic 27 Feb 93 p 2

["Baghdad Chamber of Commerce Invests its Capacities To Ensure Flow of Goods in Local Markets"]

[Text] The year 1992 was replete with numerous activities among all of the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce's permanent departments and committees. Certain aspects of these activities were explored in an exclusive interview with chamber President Sabih Muhammad Ja'far al-Shabibi, who indicated that the previous year's efforts had focused on the support and development of economic activity and the presentation of commercial services to merchants in an attempt to break the burden of the unjust economic blockade imposed on Iraq.

In response to a question about the areas in which these activities were undertaken, al-Shabibi replied: "These efforts were apparent in numerous activities in which the chamber continued to follow up on commercial concerns and local markets through the formation of committees and work teams to investigate all problems and particulars that confronted merchants during the practice of their businesses. These included follow-up on purchases from commercial exchange areas, the formation of teams to conduct tours of Baghdad markets to offer guidelines and education to merchants with the objective of assuring the flow of basic foodstuffs in the markets, in addition to compliance with price oversight committee's decision. The committee is part of the Iraqi Chambers of Commerce Union.

Other positions mentioned by al-Shabibi included the chamber's backing of the establishment of commercial firms specializing in the importation of legally permitted foodstuffs and consumer items, enhancement of chamber members' knowledge, and their appraisal of the latest officially sanctioned developments and directives. The chamber played a prominent role in implementing Ministry of Trade guidelines on specification of the goods that were excluded from the import list and prevention of their circulation in local markets. The chamber has formed 11 employee groups to undertake communication of guidelines and prohibited goods lists to the merchants and the guidance and direction thereof in the implementation of this decision.

The chamber's efforts have won the praise and appreciation of the President's Office and the Ministry of Trade.

He further added: "The efforts we have mentioned have had other expressions, including establishment of a 'Charity Fund' to provide financial assistance to poor and low-income families. Merchants continually donate to this fund, enabling it to fulfill the humanitarian goal for which it was established. The chamber has donated 250,000 dinars in support of this fund."

Diyala Governor on Reconstruction of Province

93AF0431A Baghdad AL-'IRAQ in Arabic 6 Mar 93 p 3

[Interview with Tu'mah Du'ayyif Qitan, governor general of Diyala Province, by 'Irfan Sa'd al-Din; place and date not given: "We Continue Our Efforts Implement President's Gesture to Mandali City"]

[Text] Diyala Province is currently witnessing extensive campaigns to develop and improve services rendered to the citizens as part of the implementation of the gesture of President Saddam Husayn, may God keep him and bless him, to allocate 16.93 million dinars to develop the city of Mandali and the rest of the province. All of the different service establishments are continuing their efforts to develop the city.

In order to get a firsthand account of the volume of work that has been done to develop the province and the projects implemented as a result of the president's directive, AL-'IRAQ, accompanied Tu'mah Du'ayyif Qitan, governor general of Diyala on a tour of the projects being implemented and got a firsthand account of the efforts being exerted by the service and agricultural institutions in implementing the projects entrusted to them in an exceptionally short time to provide the citizens of the province with the best services, especially because they have reiterated their allegiance to the great land of Iraq and President Saddam Husayn.

The governor expressed to AL-'IRAQ the gratitude and appreciation of the people of the province to President Saddam Husayn. He affirmed that the people of Diyala will constantly remain sharp swords in the hands of the president to defend the sovereignty, integrity, and honor of Iraq and to support the path of its development. He also affirmed that this gesture will be an incentive for more serious and fruitful work on the part of the departments and institutions of the province to provide the very best services to the people.

Broad Campaign

The governor explained that the different departments in the province have started a broad campaign to implement the president's gift and to distribute the provisions to the families hurt by the aerial attack during the glorious Qadisiyah battle. He added that the value of the gift is about 5 million dinars. He said that the service departments in the province have started a broad campaign to develop and clean the city of Mandali, the sons of which courageously faced the yellow winds that blew from Iran during the unjust Iranian aggression that lasted for eight years.

Distributing Plots of Land

Regarding the volume of services extended to the people and dealing with the rising water tables, the governor said that the municipalities in the province are doing their best to provide the people with suitable housing and to implement the president's orders to provide dignified and happy lives to the people of the province. The municipalities have already finished the process of allocating and distributing 3,380 housing plots to the people in the different parts of the province. In addition, 1,300 housing plots have been distributed to the people in the city of Ba'qubah and that the municipalities are doing their best to provide housing plots for everybody.

Paving the Streets According to the Iraqi Method

The governor said that there are many service activities being implemented according to the Iraqi method of economizing that was approved by the interior minister. According to this method, 2,621,875 dinars have been saved in a project to pave 14 km of al-Buguri Street in al-Khalis and 35 km of al-Birqadar Street in Jalula'. In addition, 1,495 million dinars have been saved as a result of fixing 139 vehicles that were out of order but were later fixed in the municipalities' garages. Also, 75,000 dinars have been saved in the development of the city of al-Khalis.

Drainage Projects

The governor said that the province is suffering from rising water tables, which makes it vulnerable to environmental and health problems. That is why a great effort is being made to deal with this problem. The province has started to build three major drainage projects to get rid of the water that has accumulated in the streets and also to deal with the problem of swamps by building open canals that are linked to the major sewage system. The province is also adopting the Iraqi method of economizing in implementing the first and second al-Tahrir drains of al-Tahrir and the 7 April drain. It is worth mentioning that the first al-Tahrir drain is 3 km long and 2 meters deep, while the second al-Tahrir drain is 1 km long and 2 to 3 meters deep. The 7 April drain is 5 meters deep; 1,000 cubic meters of dust and debris have been lifted from it.

The completion of these three drains will eliminate the accumulating water and will deal with the rising water tables in the sections of 7 April and the offices and grounds behind the Iraqi Company for Date Distribution in Diyala. The province is also witnessing projects to build sewage networks and water pumps in addition to projects to provide potable water.

Extensive Campaign

As for the campaign to beautify and clean the city, the governor said that great efforts are being made to get rid of the garbage and the swamps in the city and in the different parts of the province. Efforts are also being made to educate the people about the need to participate

in cleaning and beautifying the provinces in such a way that enables it to live up to its historical position along the path of human civilization. He said that there are sweeping campaigns on the part of the departments of health and restaurants and street vendors and butcher shops to guarantee the health of the people.

Agricultural Campaign

As for the agricultural campaign in the province, the governor said that the president's order to increase the price paid by the government for different agriculture crops has encouraged farmers to expand the amount of cultivated area to increase productivity. He also added that the province has provided the necessary items for the agricultural campaign, such as fertilizers, seeds, and equipment, to increase the areas planted with rice and yellow corn and to achieve the highest productivity of food crops and provide food for the people in order to break the unjust economic blockade imposed on our country.

Stabilization of Domestic Market

The governor pointed out that the province is currently witnessing great stability in the local markets as a result of continuous follow-up by officials and also as a result of the cooperation and coordination among the party and the popular and professional organizations with the relevant authorities.

Health and Postal Service

Regarding activities in the fields of health services and telecommunications, the governor indicated that the province is concentrating on health services by establishing 17 new health centers and inaugurating a hospital in Jalula', in addition to fixing all of the other medical centers and supplying them with the necessary supplies.

As for telecommunications, the governor indicated that a new telephone exchange has been built. This exchange provides a large number of telephone lines for the city. He also mentioned that the buildings for the telecommunication and postal services have been fixed and that there are currently direct lines with Baghdad and other cities. He also mentioned that there are activities to establish a telephone exchange to provide 500 telephone lines. He indicated that this network will cover all of the areas that have been damaged by activities of treason and treachery.

On the other hand, the governor paid tribute to the great efforts being made to support the cooperative activities and increasing the role of cooperative societies, which provide people with essentials at reasonable prices.

In conclusion, the governor promised President Saddam Husayn on behalf of all of the people of Diyala to continue their creative work in all fields of life so that the current year will be one of development in all walks of

life and the year of conclusive victory for the Iraqi will. He also promised that the people will remain at the disposal of the president.

MOROCCO

Swiss Delegation: Trade Agreement Negotiated

93AF0506A Casablanca LA VIE ECONOMIQUE
in French 2 Apr 93 p 11

[Article by A. Al Maleh: "Small- and Medium-Size Businesses and Industries, the Engines of Cooperation"—first paragraph is LA VIE ECONOMIQUE introduction]

[Text] Are Morocco and Switzerland about to agree on bilateral cooperation?

There is every reason to believe that they will, now that a large Swiss economic delegation is paying a visit to the Kingdom. At any rate, this is a premiere; the delegation, consisting of business and Swiss Government representatives and headed by Mr. Nicolas Imboden, government delegate to commercial agreements, intends to provide new impetus to bilateral cooperation, instituting a true spirit of partnership between the two countries' small- and medium-size businesses and industries.

"Can do better!" This is the comment one is tempted to make concerning the current level of trade between Morocco and Switzerland. Certainly, Moroccan exports to the Swiss market have steadily risen during the past three years. By value, they rose from 25.8 million Swiss francs in 1990 to 42.2 million Swiss francs in 1991 (1 Swiss franc = 6 dirhams). But the trade balance between the two countries continues to be in favor of Switzerland, although Moroccan imports from that country have decreased by value, from 141 million Swiss francs in 1990 to 138.1 million Swiss francs in 1992.

Exploration in Every Direction

This visit should end with the signature of a draft agreement by Mr. Imboden, the Swiss Government delegate to bilateral agreements, and the Moroccan finance minister, to avoid the current double taxation. The Swiss point out that this is a considerable hindrance, one that ought to be transcended. Logically, this obstacle will be removed, especially since the Moroccan economy, marked by increased openness to the outside, is resolutely committed to that orientation. However, apart from this guarantee sought after by Swiss operators, we should say that the investment of Swiss interests in the context of a partnership—still to be defined—with local partners is multidimensional. It involves several cooperation sectors ranging from the agrifood business to chemicals, and including environmental protection and other service companies. Certainly, in some sectors, Swiss giants are already represented in Morocco, in particular Nestle and Ciba-Geigy. However, other smaller Swiss companies are particularly interested in

Morocco. National operators looking for an effective partnership may rely on this fad to come to terms with their Swiss peers. The Swiss economy, as is known, consists of over 90 percent of small- and medium-size businesses. What a prospect for business opportunities! At any rate, the Swiss delegation that will meet Moroccan employers to explore partnership opportunities includes several distinguished representatives from commercial and industrial sectors. For instance, ETA SA [expansion not given], one of the largest watch and clockwork manufacturers worldwide. DEVAGRI SA [expansion not given], an agrifood development company already represented in Tangiers. Bonnard, and Gardel Consulting Engineers SA, which specializes in power-generating facilities and hydraulic engineering. SHC [expansion not given], the world quality control leader, Nestle SA, Ciba-Geigy, etc.

Tangiers, 'Superstar'

It is true, however, that this panel is enriched with delegates from Swiss financial institutions. Nothing is more normal since the vitality of the Swiss tertiary sector still depends to a large extent on its banking instrument, which acts in every respect as a mainspring. The SBS (Swiss Bank Corporation) headquartered in Zurich delegated its assistant director and regional manager who is in charge of all branches in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and French-speaking Africa.

As for the Swiss Credit Union, not to be outdone, it dispatched its manager of commercial and banking relations with latin European, Maghreb, and French-speaking African countries, who also happens to be on the board of Swiss Credit Union (France), Societe Generale (Morocco), and the Bank of Tunisia. These two prestigious banks show a keen interest in the Tangiers offshore zone.

Wave of Violence at Meknes University

93AF0506B Algiers EL WATAN in French
12-13 Mar 93 p 14

[Unattributed article: "Morocco: Fundamentalist Violence"—first paragraph is EL WATAN introduction]

[Text] Three students were seriously wounded by fundamentalists at the Meknes university, which has been experiencing an unprecedented wave of violence since last Friday, the Moroccan newspaper EL BAYAN reported in its latest issue.

In a local correspondent's report, the newspaper indicated that a group of bearded students of the fundamentalist persuasion had been spreading terror at the Meknes science faculty and student halls in an attempt to lay down the law with chains, knives, and billy clubs.

According to EL BAYAN, it all started on Friday, 5 March, around midnight, when two groups of bearded men armed to the teeth burst in the student halls.

The first group, consisting of residents, came in through the main door while the second, consisting of men who did not belong to the student body and were armed with chains, billy clubs, knives, and swords, scaled the wall of the student halls and caused bloody incidents there for about 30 minutes.

One of these men, probably the leader according to the newspaper, was communicating with the outside by means of a walkie-talkie.

On Saturday, 6 March, at the science faculty, many bearded men armed with clubs, chains, and knives engaged in the most casual manner and with full impunity in "purification" and "cleansing" operations, manhandling all those who were not of their own persuasion in full view of the administration and with its full knowledge.

According to the newspaper, the most serious incident occurred on Monday, 8 March, after the fast was broken, when a second-year student was attacked by a group of bearded men on his way back to the student halls. Cowardly knifed in the back, he was transported to the hospital where he underwent an operation that saved his life; before that, another student, who is also at the Meknes hospital now, was severely beaten and hit with bricks, causing serious head injuries.

On Tuesday, 9 March, the bearded men came back in still greater numbers. They prayed in front of the student halls before scattering, accusing the others, all the others, of being at the origin of these acts of violence.

SYRIA

Activities of Rifat al-Asad Scrutinized

93WD0481Z Paris L'EVENEMENT DU JEUDI
in French 11-17 Mar 93 pp 66-83

[Article by Jean-Guy Gourson and Frederic Ploquin: "Rifat al-Asad: Billionaire, Shadowy Figure, and Brother of Syria's Head of State"—first paragraph is L'EVENEMENT DU JEUDI introduction]

[Text] For some months now, and with the help of EVENEMENT DU JEUDI's foreign correspondents, Jean-Guy Gourson and Frederic Ploquin have investigated one of the most surprising and controversial notables in the Near East firmament. Forced into exile by his brother, Syria's head of state, whom he tried to overthrow, Rifat al-Asad has consistently been afforded every possible diplomatic protection in our country. Why has no one wanted to know how this ex-colonel now billionaire built his fortune? This is what we have tried to learn in bringing to light this very explosive case!

The man is light skinned, of medium build, with curly chestnut-brown hair and a receding hairline. He is wearing gray woolen trousers, black boots, a bright blue shirt from Lanvin, and a black woolen chine jacket. With four bullets from a .38-caliber revolver lodged in his

head, he lies on the shoulder of the Soleil highway, not far from Valence. In one of his pockets is a pack of Spanish cigarettes, Fortunas. In the other are found a 500-franc note, a telephone calling card, and a brown comb. Only his watch, with an electronic notebook, seems to connect him to the land of the living. But for now—December 1986—the public prosecutor opens an investigation into “voluntary homicide of an unidentified person...”

The first important clues came from French counterespionage. Two months after the corpse was discovered, DST [Directorate of Territorial Security] agents were able to identify it as the body of one Mabruk, or Marzuq, Berni. Further details followed: The man was traveling in France on a Moroccan passport, and he belonged to the entourage of Rifat al-Asad, the brother of Syria's president, who had established his domicile in Paris more than a year earlier.

Now things became clearer: The investigation began to push into a ticklish area. Forced into exile by the older brother he had tried to overthrow but still bearing the sham title of vice president, Rifat al-Asad has enjoyed the unfailing support of French diplomacy, which since the late 1970's has embraced him as its candidate to succeed the incumbent...in Syria. He received dubious favors from Raymond Barre himself. His successors—Jacques Chirac included—have continued to give him special treatment, making allowances and affording him protections of all sorts. Long identified as the head of Syria's clandestine services, Rifat's name naturally was linked to Palestinian attacks perpetrated in Europe by the Abu Nidal organization. But in the highest circles of officialdom, people pretend to believe he has “mellowed.” The imposing security force, armed to the teeth, which keeps close watch on his security is tolerated with no questions asked. All the “rumors” about how the ex-colonel now a billionaire (with his own yacht and jets to boot) allegedly built his fortune on arms sales or drug trafficking are disdainfully ignored. Reasons of state must take precedence over all that! Customs and tax collectors are told to shut their eyes to the source of the colossal sums that enabled him to build up a vast real estate empire scattered across France and several other EEC countries. In short, Rifat is a “protected guest.” Untouchable. The gendarmes of Valence and the magistrate in charge of the judicial investigation would soon learn this to their sorrow.

But let us return to the corpse on [Highway] A7. The DST bulletin, disseminated by wire to all police services, struck a chord with an inspector stationed in Strasbourg. In April 1986, he had gone to Brussels as part of a probe into trafficking in upscale automobiles between Europe and the Middle East. A handful of Lebanese and Syrians had escaped the dragnet, among them a certain 'Abd-al-Razzaq Barniyah, alias “Marzuq,” born in Damascus in 1950.... The affair had begun with the discovery of stolen automobiles in a parking lot in the Alsatian capital [i.e., Strasbourg]. A consignment of new locks found at the scene enabled investigators to follow the trail back to

two Syrians living in a hotel in town. One of the aliens, a Frenchman of Syrian origin, was tailed all the way to Paris, where it was decided to “put the squeeze” on him. A well-known trafficker, he named names, including Ziyad 'Abaji, a Syrian agent with multiple aliases sought in the FRG [as published] for murdering an opponent of the Damascus regime. Most important, he fingered his boss: a certain “Mudar,” who by his account was none other than one of Rifat's sons! Of course, the flatfoots took this tip with a measure of skepticism. However, the gray-haired nonentity who printed documents for the gang also pointed them in the direction of the al-Asad family.

Since then, the Belgians have issued an arrest warrant for 'Abd-al-Razzaq Barniyah. But the latter is also being sought in Italy. A certain transporter of stolen autos, caught red-handed, confessed his crimes before a judge in Milan. According to his testimony, Barniyah's door was always open at his headquarters in the Hotel Ramada in Brussels, from which location he and a Lebanese associate ran the illicit traffic, sending big luxury cars from Belgium to the ports of Rotterdam, Barcelona, and Athens. The transporter had very expensive taste in clothes and was a regular nightclub patron.

He met Barniyah in a suite at the Hilton Hotel in Rotterdam, greasing the palm of the captain of the “Lady Hiba,” a freighter whose hold was filled with Mercedes heading for Dubai.

Fingerprints and photos taken by the judicial identification team confirmed that the body found on the shoulder of Highway A7 was that of Barniyah. Interpol [International Criminal Police Organization] Wiesbaden was able to shed additional light. According to this source, Barniyah maintained ties to the clandestine services of his native country. But out of the blue an anonymous correspondent threw an even harsher light on the case: Barniyah, he said, was eliminated because he had become “too troublesome.” And he readily provided names of the alleged participants in that punitive operation: Ranku Nidal, a Syrian wanted by the Anvers police, the agent Ziyad 'Abaji, and a certain Bassam Bitar. The information was immediately confirmed by a telex from Damascus dated 3 February 1987 in which the victim's brother, Muhammad Ghassab Barniyah, bluntly accuses 'Abaji of the crime.

Then the Spanish made their contribution to the probe. They too wanted to get their hands on Barniyah, who had slipped through their fingers near Marbella, on the Costa del Sol. They provided transcripts of several monitored telephone conversations of Syrians discussing Barniyah's death. The name of Ziyad 'Abaji came up frequently in these conversations, as did that of Bassam Bitar, who at the time was in Greece. The Spaniards also sent gendarmes in Valence a series of reports on the financial channels used by the ring, including the Audi Bank in Geneva.

The investigation was closing in on the group of suspects, and the deceased's watch provided further information about them. With the help of the importer of the Casio brand in France, espionage technicians sifted through the data stored in the electronic diary. More than 16 telephone numbers were deciphered and recomposed. Two were of particular interest to investigators. The first was that of Bassam Bitar, who after working at the Syrian Embassy as an interpreter and driver became the owner of a parking garage in Asnieres, in the Paris suburbs, where he had three different addresses. The second number belonged to the domicile of Raja' Barakat—one of Rif'at al-Asad's wives—on Paris's Avenue President Kennedy, in a luxurious building where gendarmes noted the comings and goings of individuals they quickly identified as "bodyguards of Syrian diplomats serving in Paris."

The DST completed its report. The Valence assassination is bluntly described therein as a settling of accounts within Rif'at al-Asad's entourage. And one of the vice president's sons—the notorious "Mudar"—was implicated in the trafficking operation being run from Belgium. As was Bassam Bitar, the "parking garage owner," another alleged clan member who could be "linked" to Barniya's disappearance.

The Valence gendarmes now focused their attention on Bitar. By monitoring his telephone, investigators identified his contacts in Greece, FRG—in Mannheim and Bonn, where he frequented the Romanian Embassy—Spain, and of course, Syria. But it was another anonymous tip that made possible the next breakthrough: From 13 December 1986 to 29 January 1987, Ziyad 'Abaji had stayed in a Paris hotel, the Plaza Mirabeau, where he was registered under the name of Kamil Burhan. Among those to whom he placed calls from his room were Bassam Bitar and Raja' Barakat.

He also contacted several bank bureaus, such as the Tunisian Banking Union on Boulevard Belleville (20th arrondissement). More surprisingly, he dialed the direct line of a DST official! The investigation determined too that it was the Syrian Embassy (Bitar, actually) that installed 'Abaji at the Plaza Mirabeau, from which location he set off in January on a short trip to Brussels. And then...nothing. The investigation was dead in the water. A Paris lawyer, Mr. Jacquet, called the judge responsible for the case, telling him that if perchance he were interested in hearing testimony from Raja' Barakat, it would be best to contact him. But no one took it into his head to ask the vice president's wife or Bassam Bitar for clarifications. "On orders from the public prosecutor of Valence," no search was made of their respective domiciles.

On 22 January 1987, the gendarmes concluded their investigation. The case wound its way to dismissal, as discreetly recorded in these laconic words on 3 September 1990: "Whereas the investigations conducted in an effort to identify the author or authors of the murder have been fruitless...the examining magistrate is asked to

find that there are no grounds for indictment." Case filed away! And nothing came to trouble the peaceful life of Raja' Barakat. As for Bassam Bitar, after selling his garage to promoters—along with a few Mercedes which nobody had bothered to claim—he decamped with no forwarding address.

However, even six years after Barniyah's execution, there might still be evidence that could lead to his unknown confederate. To find it, investigators had only to explore the underground parking lot at 79 Quai Andre-Citroen, a stone's throw from the Plaza Mirabeau. There, gathering dust in basement level 2 of the Orphee tower, in numbered parking slots set aside for the Panamanian company Sounoune S.A., sat cars whose tax stickers had not been renewed since 1986. In slot No. 727 was an Audi 100 with clumsily affixed Belgian plates. Its registration number, DAR 858 corresponded to a vehicle that was reported stolen in 1986 by the Carbis company, a car rental business based in Brussels (275 Avenue Louise). And whoever had the keys might well hold the answer to the mystery killing on the Soleil Highway, because Barniyah was reportedly driving a Belgian-tagged Audi 100 on his last trip between Brussels and Paris, a few days before his death.

But wait: Twenty-seven of the 286 apartments in the Orphee tower are owned by members of the al-Asad family—under their own name or under the cover of Sounoune S.A. It was also here that the Syrian vice president in 1985 installed part of his entourage, most of them veteran secret police types and former comrades in arms, although now styled "professors" or "counselors at law." In short, not a place to snoop around in. Much less to intrude on the private affairs of a "friend of France" whose only mistake was to have tried too soon to step into his big brother's boots.

[box, p 68]

'Drop Investigation'

It's not easy to meet Rif'at al-Asad! Four times we tried to set up a meeting with His Excellency. First via the diplomatic route. But in vain. Ghassan Nusayr, press attache with the Syrian Embassy, cautiously hid behind the formula: "The ambassador considers the vice president a higher authority. Thus it is not his place to get involved. Take your request directly to Dr. al-Asad." "That's not the right way to approach it," we were then advised by one of his few French interlocutors: "Try his contacts." This also failed. On two occasions Professor al-Khuri, a highly rated urologist who works in a public hospital in Paris, put us off with some principle inspired by medical ethics. One of Rif'at al-Asad's lawyers, Mr. Khuri, Esq., also hid behind an ethical fig leaf, one which he said forbade him to serve as intermediary between his client and journalists. We were ready to give up when Dr. Khalil Ahmad, having heard of our unfruitful efforts and introducing himself as the vice president's press adviser, invited us to a meeting on neutral ground. "Newspapers generally level accusations against us without verifying

their information. We appreciate your initiative. But we have always refused interviews. Not because we have nothing to say," our interlocutor continued, "but because of our official role. The vice president is not exactly an exile. He is still a member of the central committee of the Ba'th party, a member of the People's Tribunal, and an officer in the Syrian Army. Journalists ask embarrassing questions, and he cannot respond." Along with the explanation came a scarcely veiled threat: "Judgments have been passed against every newspaper that has talked about trafficking, even the WALL STREET JOURNAL!" In conclusion, Dr. Ahmad offered us an odd bargain: "Don't publish your report, and when he comes to power—or if he is put out of the running once and for all—you will be the one to print his statements." At our request, Khalil Ahmad sent us information on the judgments passed against French media organs that dared to discuss the "sordid affairs" of his boss. Shortly afterward, a second envelope containing the full text of those same judgments—including some very harsh fines—was brought to the paper's management by messenger, at the request of Mr. Rif'at al-Asad, who "understands that EVENEMENT DU JEUDI is disposed to publish in the near future an article that might cast aspersions on his private life" and "contain allegations impugning his honor and reputation."

It was a second warning, one that corroborated numerous other cautionary remarks, both from high-ranking police officials and from politicians anxious to protect "the greater interests of France." "If you attack him, Rif'at will leave!" one of them warned. [end box]

It was on 13 November 1983, 13 years to the day after taking power, that Syria's head of state was rushed urgently to the hospital in Damascus, having suffered an infarction. The Arab world held its breath. In Lebanon, 'Arafat loyalists besieged in Tripoli saw their fate hanging by the thin and wavering line of an electrocardiogram. "Hafiz is dead!", "He's going to die." Soon the rumors were racing through souks, ministries, and chancelleries. By late November, there were unconfirmed reports of armed confrontations between supporters of Rif'at and the presidential guard. Portraits of Rif'at were strewn all over the streets of Damascus, stuck to windshields and rear windows of cars. Vehicles rigged up with loudspeakers and supporters shouting through megaphones paid joint homage to the chief whose heart was worn out and to the younger brother in the prime of his years. To the moneyed circles in the capital, he promised to liberalize the economy and openly claimed the succession.

At age 46, the youngest of the three al-Asad brothers believed his time had come. To this spoiled, temperamental, quarrelsome child who grew up in the tutelary shadow of an elder brother who required his submission as the price of indulgence, the succession seemed a part of the natural order. He owed everything he had—his rank as colonel, his seat on the executive board of the

Ba'th Party, his influence, and his immense fortune—to Hafiz. But did he not pay anything in return?

His career began in 1965. With his degree in economics and political science, he was given an administrative position in customs. Then he entered the army. A mere lieutenant on the eve of the coup of 23 February 1966, he was promoted to captain after his elder brother was named defense minister. On 12 March 1971, Hafiz became supreme commander. The armed forces were dispersed and put in the hands of rival factions. The country was divided among a congeries of special services, all solidly partitioned from each other. Hafiz sowed division, the better to rule. Rif'at was made responsible for establishing the Revolutionary Defense Brigades (Saraya-al-Difa' 'an al-Thawrah). Enjoying budgetary autonomy and equipped with modern weapons, these shock troops were outside the regular chain of military command and had their own intelligence service.

In 1973, at the time of the Yom Kippur war, their 18,000 officers and men were sent to the front lines. Sporting an orange beret, Rif'at fought Israeli forces in the battle for Mount Hermon, at the head of his paratroop commandos, the "pink panthers," whose camouflage outfits were the colors of the desert. The brigades' exploits became the stuff of legend: Their chief financed a film he hoped would immortalize them. Although decorated and raised to the rank of lieutenant colonel, the fighter was not content with military recognition; once peace was restored, he embellished his curriculum vitae with a doctorate in economics from the University of Moscow—thanks to a thesis said to have been prepared by a humble official in the Planning Ministry. Chosen in 1975 to serve on the regional executive of the Ba'th Party, it was only natural that this distinguished economist should have been put in charge of the Department of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Ten years after the Yom Kippur war, when the country's future once again hung in the balance, the Revolutionary Defense Brigades were able to muster 50,000 men, three armored brigades, a mechanized infantry brigade equipped with 350 T-72 Soviet tanks, an artillery regiment, and a regiment of anti-aircraft missiles and cannons. But it was to less glorious feats of arms that they owed their notoriety. In the meantime, opposition to the regime had hardened. After the attempted coup of June 1980, the country was shaken by a wave of terrorist attacks on public buildings, officials, military officers. The revolt, fomented by the Muslim Brotherhood, was directed expressly against the Alawite community (to which the al-Asad clan belongs), which it accused of monopolizing all power to the detriment of the Sunni who make up 90 percent of the population. Regime opponents denounced all sorts of things—immunity from prosecution, corruption, the illicit trafficking in various wares, including drugs, that was fueled by the occupation troops stationed in Lebanon. One man came to symbolize all these bitter accusations: Rif'at al-Asad. At the time he was deemed the richest man in Damascus

(American sources estimated his fortune at \$100 million; 10 years later, the estimate was 10 times as much!). It was members of his own security guard, the "moukhabarat," who "owned" the black market in cigarettes and contraband automobiles. Finally, the more religious judged him harshly for his ostentatious appetite for the fair sex—even if, by having four wives, he was following the path of the Prophet in at least one respect.

Rif'at was a thorn in his elder brother's side. But in those troubled times, he had need of his services. On 27 June 1980, right after a failed attack against the supreme leader, it was Rif'at's own son-in-law, Major Mu'in Nasif, who at the head of the "pink panthers" orchestrated the massacre of some 500 Muslim Brotherhood members detained at Palmyre prison. And in February 1982 the brigades provided most of the units sent to suppress the insurrection in Hama, the Muslim Brotherhood stronghold, where every man old enough to bear arms was shot down in full view of the women, elderly, and children. Sources estimate the number of victims variously at 10-25,000.

Did Rif'at lose his nerve? A hairsbreadth from seizing power, he let it slip through his fingers. Hafiz's heart mended. After two months in a hospital bed, the supreme leader suddenly—and forcefully—resumed command. Mu'in Nasif was demoted, and a handful of officers close to Rif'at were placed under arrest. The chief of the brigades then tried to force the issue: He ordered his troops to march on Damascus. But they were met by Shafiq Fayyad and the special forces under 'Ali Haydar. It was what Syrians would call the "battle of Rif'at versus the 'Aliyin"—an alliance of high-ranking 'Aliyin officers including 'Ali Haydar, Deputy Chief of Staff 'Ali Aslan, Commander of the Air Force 'Ali Saleh, and the head of army intelligence, 'Ali Duba.

The palace revolution collapsed. But tensions persisted. The Ba'th leadership sat in council nonstop from 9 February to 1 March 1984. Once again, it was the president himself who came up with the unlikely solution: a tricephalous vice presidency, which Khaddam and Rif'at—irreconcilable enemies—would share with Zuhayr Mashariqah, head of the Ba'th. Finally, Rif'at's "promotion" was coupled with a pledge to the 'Aliyin: The defense brigades would be dissolved. A pure masterpiece.

In April, Rif'at sent his two newest wives and seven of his 14 children to France. On 19 May, at Latakia, his supporters engaged in another pitched battle against 'Ali Haydar's special forces. Nine days later, the two belligerents were sent to do penance in Moscow, but Rif'at quickly returned to Geneva to undergo "routine medical tests." The Syrian president used the opportunity to dissolve the defense brigades. Their armored units were assimilated into the regular army, 20,000 reservists were sent back to their homes, and the rest of the troops were attached to the presidential guard—with the exception of 3,000 men left under the command of the vice president.

Who was strongly "encouraged" to enjoy for a bit longer the balmy climate of Lake Geneva....

Temporary rift, or definitive rupture? Analysts believe the two brothers may have reached a sort of mutual nonaggression pact. A cunning but ambiguous artifice. Complex. France, which refused to abandon the Near East theater to American diplomacy, made constant overtures to Damascus and (to say the least) fawned obsequiously over the exile. Khaddam was supposed to come to Paris at the invitation of Pierre Mauroy. Syria proposed that Rif'at replace him. But His Excellency had to be persuaded. In June, Francois de Grossouvre, special adviser to Francois Mitterrand, went to Geneva to assure the vice president that if he visited France he would be received by several cabinet ministers. Rif'at sulked: "It will be the head of state, or nothing!"

Months went by. July 1984: The Elysee let it be known Francois Mitterrand would go to Damascus if invited. August: Rif'at made a "private visit" to France. September: In an interview with DER SPIEGEL, General Mustafa Talas, Syria's minister of defense, asserted Rif'at was "permanently persona non grata in Syria." "When our president tells someone, 'Slip off to Geneva!,' they do it. People who say no to President al-Asad end up a head shorter!" he added bluntly. But on the night of 25-26 November a special Syrian Airlines Boeing 727 flew from Orly to Damascus. The prodigal child returned, just a few hours before the French head of state arrived for a three-day official visit. Salvos of Kalashnikov fire greeted him on his reappearance. Those responsible for the fireworks were immediately arrested, tried, and sentenced to pay for the wasted ammunition. But at the dinner given in honor of Francois Mitterrand, attended also by his counterparts Khaddam and Mashariqah, the "ghost" was seated to the left of Jack Lang. A decree published early in November in the official government newspaper spelled out his responsibilities in full detail. It was thus in his capacity as a fully empowered vice president—"responsible for implementing the security policy decided by the party and the state"—that he sat at Mitterrand's table that evening. The Quai d'Orsay and the discreet pro-Syrian lobby were naturally very pleased with themselves.

The cohabitation established in Damascus was short-lived. Rif'at had to leave again. Swiss authorities having refused to accept him as a permanent resident, it was to Paris that Dr. al-Asad, Mr. Vice President, repaired to pursue his schizophrenic career. He was no stranger to France, having made a number of private visits. In fact, on several of these occasions, he made the headlines.

The first notable incident occurred on 15 February 1980. Two days earlier, Rif'at deplaned at Bordeaux-Mérignac airport, flanked by an escort consisting of 29 bodyguards and about 20 Syrian police. The "delegation" took lodgings at the Hotel Frantel, having reserved the entire establishment. Surrounded by a swarm of armed men, the brother of the Syrian president was admitted to the Bordeaux CHR [regional hospital center] to undergo

medical tests, in the otorhinolaryngology department headed by Professor Michel Portman, for auditory problems experienced following a terrorist attack. An entire floor was "requisitioned," and the hospital was turned into a veritable fortress, inside which Syrian word was law. To the considerable distress of the 50 French policemen—security branch officers and urban security types, as well as elite marksmen from the GIPN [expansion not given]—who had been assigned to protect this burdensome guest. The national autonomous union of plainclothes policemen (SNAPC) angrily protested what it called a "serious violation of national sovereignty." And it added: "It was only as a result of the urgent intervention of the French Government that this delegation was allowed to penetrate our territory with all its military paraphernalia." The cause of all this din? The death of Inspector Capella, killed on 31 July 1978 in a hail of bullets fired by guards of the Iraqi Embassy in Paris, as a hostage situation was unfolding.

Here's another dramatic episode that brought Rif'at to the attention of the media. On 22 April 1982, just as offices were opening for the day, a booby-trapped vehicle exploded in front of 33 Rue Marbeuf in Paris (8th arrondissement), headquarters of the pro-Iraqi periodical *AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI*. A passerby was killed and 63 persons injured. To the directors of the weekly, the perpetrator and motive for the attack were obvious: Damascus was retaliating against them for having revealed the involvement of Syrian intelligence in the assassination of Louis Delamare, France's ambassador in Lebanon, whose body was found riddled with bullets in Beirut in September 1981. In December of that year, a bomb had been found in a box in front of the weekly's premises, fortunately defused in time. Prints taken from the package identified one of the culprits as Mikha'il Kasuhah, cultural attache with the Syrian Embassy. In the hours that followed the explosion on Rue Marbeuf, then-Minister of Interior Gaston Defferre ordered the immediate expulsion of Kasuhah and the embassy's military attache, Hasan 'Ali. Rif'at, suspected by intelligence agencies of providing logistic support to terrorist groups operating in Europe, was actually in France at the time. He was staying at Vergers de la Ranchere, overlooking the Gulf of Saint-Nom-la-Breteche (Yvelines), in a luxurious villa rented by the Lebanese company Al-Jinan, around the perimeter of which some 30 Syrian bodyguards and officers of the Marly-le-Roi police station glared defiantly at each other. Attorneys for the victims protested the presence of the man they described as a "traveling salesman of terrorism." In his memoirs as "boss" of the DGSE [General Directorate for External Security], Pierre Marion describes, with a bit of swagger perhaps, his two visits to Saint-Nom-la-Breteche, where "eye to eye" he extracted from the Syrian president's brother the promise to cease all aid to the terrorist groups that had cast a shadow over Europe. A cessation of attacks that he asserts was respected for the next 3 years.

Rif'at does not get good press. But people in high places are still persuaded that one day his time will come. The

man is valuable, and exiled or not they believe he deserves to be treated with a measure of consideration. Two inspectors from VO (official travel) are responsible for providing close protection. At Quai d'Orsay, Renee Lefevre, head of the diplomatic passport and visa service, who would become a devoted friend of the al-Asad family, is in charge of facilitating his travel arrangements. Finally, another flattering attention: Francois de Grossouvre, who inherited the job of organizing hunts for the president, regularly sends him invitations to hunts at Rambouillet.

His Excellency acquired a private mansion, 38 Avenue Foch, an edifice of elegant lines with high arched windows and delicately tinted bulletproof glass. A video camera is mounted atop the black doorway. Another, attached to the front of the building, monitors approaches to the hotel and the entrance to the parking lot. And planted on the terrace a third camera moves back and forth to scan neighboring rooftops. A security apparatus, which is supplemented at street level, by four Chevrolet Blazer 4x4 with smoked-glass windows and Texas license plates, their numbers written in chalk on square plaques, that take rotating shifts in the assigned slots.

To provide suitably dignified accommodations for guests, the vice president has also acquired the Saint-Jacques horse farm in the Oise valley: a 45-hectare estate straddling the communes of Bessancourt and Taverny, close by the headquarters of France's nuclear strike force. Land records show the property as owned by a company registered in Liechtenstein, AYM—an anagram of "May," the first name of one of Rif'at's eight daughters [Mayy]—the principal shareholder of which is another "spoiled brat," Prince 'Abdallah, a great enthusiast of horses and nocturnal pleasures but more important the designated heir to the Saudi throne. A park girdled by barbed wire and a concrete wall surrounds a late 18th century chateau now flanked by two contemporary wings with colorful facades of mixed white, pink, and ochre, and numerous annexes. A landing area for helicopters has been cleared at the rear of the chateau, improvements for which would cost Rif'at more than 200 million French francs [Fr] over a two-year period. And six infrared cameras are scattered over the carefully maintained lawns. In May 1984, a mysterious commando turned up unexpectedly at the horse farm. Two guards were neutralized with tear gas, and two others received knife wounds. It didn't happen again. Static surveillance replaced the armed patrols, which in the early days met and turned back local residents who tried to approach the chateau—a practice that occasioned some "frictions." Now a lone sentry, ensconced most of the time in an armchair with metal backing and ripped-out upholstery, keeps watch at the park's main gate. In an effort to be a good neighbor—and, it is said, in exchange for getting his building permits approved with no delays—he endowed the commune of Bessancourt with a brand-new gymnasium. But vigilance was not relaxed. On our first visit, two men in jeans and wind-breakers strongly advised us against following the path

that circles the property. A thick-set and rather disagreeable Syrian warned us that "Here, you are in Syria!" And an obliging Frenchman with the awkward bearing of a cop urged: "Don't go any further, or you may find a stray bullet." Several weeks later, a mustached and musclebound Cerberus sitting in a decrepit R5 forced us to turn back without getting the chateau on film.

Watchmen and chauffeurs, administrative and maintenance personnel: Packed like sardines into former horse stalls turned into lodgings, 10 or more families live year-round at the estate. The children are taken to the village school in a Fiat minibus of Geneva registration. In other respects, the little community seems almost perfectly self-sufficient: Bessancourt merchants never see a Syrian in their shops.

In October 1985, responding to the call of the "chief," more than 150 of the faithful, armed with passports bearing visas obtained from the French Embassy in Damascus, came to swell the ranks of what French authorities discreetly called "the Syrian delegation." While on board the Boeing 727 that took them to Paris, they were given consecutively numbered false Moroccan passports all endorsed by the same hand. "Lawyer," "professor," or "student," most were documented as natives of "al-Qardahah," a Moroccan homonym of the Syrian al-Qardahah, ancestral home of the al-Asad family. Among these companions in exile: the director of Syrian internal security, Muhammad Ghanim (Moroccan passport No. 262351), Colonel Sulayman Jadid, head of clandestine services for Europe (No. 262356), the inevitable Maj. Mu'in (No. 262357), the director of Rifat's military bureau in Damascus, Tahir al-'Abid (No. 262363), Colonel Muhammad al-Khayir (No. 262376), Captain Zuhayr al-Asad (No. 262392), and of course Colonel Malik Zurayq, chief of the vice president's personal guard. Plus a "fan club": a dozen females, previously recruited into the paratroop commandos—Shakirah Yusuf, Majidah Khidr, Fadhia Hasan, Ra'idah, Fatimah Najmah, Muna, and the others—who subsequently would be sent secretly to Tarbes to receive 13 months of training as helicopter pilots from French military instructors....

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'Little Gifts'

The scene as described by Pierre Marion took place in May 1982, just a few weeks after the deadly attack on Rue Marbeuf. Received by Rifat al-Asad, the DGSE chief, concerned to deter further terrorist actions, threatened preemptive "hits" against the Syrian agents who make up the support networks for the Abu Nidal group. At that point Rifat asked Pierre Marion point blank if he could obtain for him the dimensions of Francois Mitterrand's office, as he wished to present him a damascened partition. The head of "La Piscine" took an evasive tack: "The president will not accept such a gift."—"What about a damascened desk?"—"I don't think he will accept that either." Rifat reiterated the

offer, this time making his interlocutor the prospective beneficiary. Before the meeting was over, the DGSE chief was offered two Arab horses. Flabbergasted, Marion pointed out that he lives in an apartment. The objection was swept aside: "That's no problem. They'll keep it for you at the stables of 'Abdallah (Editor's Note: future heir to the Saudi throne) in Chantilly."

According to one of Rifat's former companions in exile, the damascened desk eventually found its way into the home of an important personage on the political right. And a leader of the same party who had a garage but no stable ended up swapping the two pure-blood Arab horses for the horsepower of an armored Cadillac! [end box]

To accommodate everyone, Rifat needed more real estate. Members of the inner circle were ensconced in 100 Avenue President Kennedy, a long building in the "steamship" style, which at the time was the most expensive real estate in Paris per square foot. The vice president himself has a suite there, as do his two youngest wives, Raja' Barakat and Lynn al-Khayir, and his oldest daughter Tamador, wife of Nasif. Most of the troupe live on the left bank, in apartments in Orphee tower—whose tenants soon began to dub it "Citroen city"—where security is provided by Alawite veterans always recognizable by their denim jackets. Only one member of the family—Firas, the third son—chose to live elsewhere. He divides his time between Geneva, his villa of Sainte-Genevieve-des-Bois in the Essonne, and his discreet "little flat" at 10 Avenue Foch Square, a short walk from the "vice presidency" along the "side-walk of the Amazons"—the prostitutes who solicit customers in cars between Etoile and Bois de Boulogne. This private mansion has no less than 13 principal rooms and carries a high overhead: Fr346,050 in taxes assessed for 1989!

Dr. al-Asad, who aspires to build a press empire, has bought from an oil company a property once owned by the Aga Khan, a neo-Moorish building at 25 Rue Jasmine (16th arrondissement). Crystal chandeliers, dark woodwork, an immense black-and-white checkered entry hall, and, in a small room on the mezzanine, a half-dozen monitor screens across which pass the distorted profiles of passersby and visitors. This is the site of the head offices of the monthly AL-FURSAN ("The Cavaliers")—formerly published in Damascus but now banned in Syria—an organ whose avowed aim is to reflect the political thought of Rifat al-Asad. With a circulation of 30,000, AL-FURSAN is published by Syara, a SARL [limited liability company] whose stock is held jointly by the Panamanian company Firama Development Inc. and Mayy al-Asad, the favorite daughter of the "boss." The latter has entrusted the running of the enterprise to his son Firas, while another of his many scions, Durayd, serves as its political consultant. Two other publications, focusing on fashion and decorating—a pair of financial sinkholes named for Rifat's twin

sisters Shadzha and Maysun—complete the line-up of the Rif'at Media group, which once was in the running to buy out MINUTE.

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Rif'at's Boeings

Rif'at al-Asad appreciates comfort, and is even more fond of security. For his many trips, he has two private airplanes. The first is a Boeing 727/200 built in 1975 and fitted out as a royal suite for Saudi billionaire Adnan Khashoggi, "the richest man in the world." In 1987, the airplane was seized at Le Bourget: "Mr. K.," up to his eyeballs in debt, was at the time being pursued by his creditors, and his flying palace, designed to accommodate 35 passengers, fell into the hands of the Sultan of Brunei, who had the infelicitous idea of installing a jacuzzi in it. Such a fixture requires taking on several tons of water, a burden that significantly reduces the aircraft's range. In April 1987, the sultan turned his toy over to Rif'at, who very quickly found it too expensive to operate and purchased a "modest" 727/100 airliner, which after being refitted could accommodate only 27 passengers. It is nevertheless easily capacious enough to hold his large family on their travels. Registered in the Cayman Islands under the codes VRCCA and VRCBV, the Boeings officially belong to the Pine Croft Company, which is domiciled in Jersey, another tax haven. In April 1990, the two planes were put up for sale through Airtrade International. At the time the 727/200, priced at \$25 million, had toted up only 3,078 landings and 6,600 hours of flight time. Its smaller brother had logged 30,000 hours and 22,200 turnarounds and was being offered for "only" \$9.5 million. [end box]

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False Passports

Flashing a Syrian passport is probably not the best way to secure unhindered passage across border checkpoints in Western countries. Long listed as one of the "terrorist states," Syria is not strictly speaking a "commendable" homeland. But that hardly explains why Rif'at al-Asad sometimes feels the need to travel under false identities. Although he and all his family members hold diplomatic passports, he also has four "spares"! He has—what could be more natural?—a Lebanese passport, as do three of his wives, Salma, Raja', and Lynn, and most of his children. He and all his retinue also hold Moroccan passports (Rif'at's is No. 737510, series DE) issued under the signature of M'Hammud Lemtuni and valid until 18 October 1994. More surprising, he is also the bearer of an Algerian diplomatic passport issued in Algiers in June 1987 by the then-secretary general at Foreign Affairs, Smail Hamdani, who shortly afterward became Algeria's ambassador to Paris! Finally, he is the bearer of a second Syrian passport, issued in December 1988 to one "Rif'at Suleyman" in Paris by the Syrian consul, Mr. Ali Hamui, on the basis of a false birth

certificate. In short, a real collection, one with which French counter-espionage is quite familiar.

Why all these passports of convenience? To this day, the ambassador of Morocco has not deigned to answer our questions. On the Algerian side, an assistant to Smail Hamdani says the latter does not remember having personally endorsed the diplomatic passports issued to Rif'at and his wives: After all, he has signed so many, many documents.... But he adds, "these 'accommodations' were a common practice at the time, especially for Palestinian leaders. Also, we had made common cause with Syria in the Refusal Front. If Rif'at asked for these passports, the Algerian Government had no reason to refuse him." For what purpose were they intended? "They were used mainly at Le Bourget airport, it's no secret," is the only explanation given by Dr. Khalil Ahmad, who heads the press office of the vice president in exile. [end box]

On 31 December 1986, a new radio station made its debut between 105 and 106 MHz on the FM band: Radio Third World (RTM), "the Arab voice from Paris." With headquarters in a private mansion on Avenue Lamballe, a stone's throw from the "steamship" building of Quai Kennedy, and relayed by an antenna mounted atop the Orphee tower, "Radio al-Asad" was born. And quite illegally. An application had been filed in October by the Al-Darb company, but neither the High Authority nor the CNCL [National Commission of Communications and Freedom] (which had just replaced it as a consequence of cohabitation) had had time to consider this delicate matter. Thus "Radio al-Asad" was broadcasting without authorization. But with the informal blessings of both Maitignon and Elysee, Rif'at's intimates hasten to add. The new "voice," however, was not to the liking of Hafiz, who lost no time expressing his displeasure. It almost provoked a diplomatic incident. RTM was pressed to get off the airwaves. Its transmitter, moved to the former studios of Kiss FM in Meudon, was eventually confiscated. No matter! Already Dr. al-Asad was hatching an even more ambitious project: He put up 8 percent of the financing for the Luxembourg television satellite, and with this participation in hand began negotiating with Grand Duchy authorities to lease a channel to cover the Maghreb and countries of the Levant.

But the al-Asad family's commercial interests are not limited to the media, a sector that in any case is not all that lucrative. The Rue Jasmine fortress is also headquarters for several other companies that were added to the commercial register between 1989 and 1991. First, the SARL Siwar, an import-export firm named after al-Asad's eleventh child (now age 17): Its capital of Fr400,000 was put together with equal shares held by two of Rif'at's wives, Raja' Barakat and Lynn al-Khayir, his daughter Mayy, and his son Firas. Then there is Amane, a subsidiary of the Panamanian company Holdings S.A.: This SARL buys, rents, and sells new or used vehicles. Finally, there is Sounoune S.A., which buys,

sells, transfers, and manages all kinds of personal property and real estate. Capitalized at Fr10,000, its corporate address is c/o Morgan and Morgan Bank, Edificio Republica, Panama City. Its top official in France is Sumar al-Asad, 20, a law student at the Sorbonne whose application for naturalization was supported by a shadowy Elysee adviser who brought the matter personally before Francois Mitterrand. Sounoun S.A. owns some of the apartments in Quai Kennedy and Orphee tower, and Sumar is also president of the real estate company located at 25 Rue Jasmine. The capital of the two SARLs managed by Rif'at's private secretary, Husayn al-Asad, was deposited—as was Syara's—in the Audi bank, a savings and loan with offices on the Champs Elysees that specializes in medium- and long-term investments.

Founded by a family of Lebanese origin, the Audi bank also established offices in Geneva, which counts among its principal shareholders the al-Sabah heirs—the family of the emir of Kuwait—and billionaire Rafiq al-Harir, who not so long ago was made prime minister of Lebanon. Rif'at, it goes without saying, has a numbered account there, also a dedicated telex line; and one of the establishment's submanagers, Ibrahim 'Abd-al-Nur, is assigned exclusively to the management of his affairs.

Dr. al-Asad, in fact, is not content just to invest in France. Through a multitude of companies, mostly domiciled in tax havens, he is a one-man multinational enterprise! An enterprise whose visible activities are mostly concerned with high-end real estate, the hotel and restaurant industry, and commerce in luxuries.

In April 1988 he purchased, from the Panamanian company Etoral Finance Inc., a six-story building then under construction—2,900 square meters of floor space—located at 12 Boulevard des Moulins in Monte Carlo. The transaction was handled by Pablo Javier Espino representing Teaside Business S.A., another empty shell domiciled in Panama, at the headquarters of Morgan and Morgan Bank. In London, where Rif'at's halo is not so visible, he acquired a private mansion in Amsdadt, an apartment house with 48 rental units and two "penthouses" at 64 Buckingham Gate (in a glass tower offering a "unique view of the royal palace"), and finally two hotels catering to tourists and businessmen, the Ramada and the Royal Camden—for which he paid cash, to the tune of 50 million pounds sterling!

But it is on Spain's Costa del Sol that the "pharaoh" (as Damascenes call him) has most fully realized his ambitions as a builder. There, in Puerto Banus, a seaside resort near Marbella, he has succeeded in making his mark, and—even better—imposing his will. Puerto Banus is his California, a blend of ersatz Andalusian grand style and imitation oriental, an amalgam of luxury bazaar and Saint-Tropezian "business center."

Five stories crowned with hanging gardens and adorned with pink tiles, marble columns, ceramic domes, fountains: Between the beach and the manmade port, Rif'at

has built a vast residential complex where about a hundred apartments ranging in size from 180 to 350 square meters are rented out. His personal suite, the "bunker"—identifiable from its smoked-glass windows—is on the third floor. But the lord of the manor also has a restaurant there (the Gray d'Albion), a nightclub (the Vendome), and deluxe boutiques. An underground parking facility serves as a museum housing his collection of automobiles: Rolls, Mercedes, Daimler, Porsche, Cadillac, etc.

There, for six months each year, ensconced in his bunker or on board his yacht the "Lara-A," accompanied by his friend Don Jaime de Mora y de Aragon, brother to Queen Fabiola of Belgium, Rif'at can truly make himself at home. He dreams of extending his empire as far as Marbella by building—on his properties at Benahavis, where one of his neighbors is Adnan Khashoggi, the fallen billionaire whose domain covers 2,000 hectares—the perfect residential enclave, linked to the coast by telephone and placed under the control of a private police. Isolated and ultraprotected, a paradise for new nabobs.

In the meantime, he reigns over Puerto Banus like a Turkish pasha. As in Paris and everywhere else, his henchmen watch over the family's security. To house them, he has acquired about 30 residential units on the outskirts of Benabola, near a nightclub and a shopping district. Within the precincts of what some Spaniards describe as a "Syrian enclave," his gorillas too make themselves at home. Sometimes they have a tendency toward excessive zeal—in 1989, they beat up photographers who had spotted the "chief" inside a restaurant. But for the most part they use methods strikingly reminiscent of the Mafia. Through the intermediary of three companies registered on Gibraltar—Khaj International, SARD International, and Cantripp Ltd.—Rif'at has acquired a collection of restaurants and night clubs on the Spanish Saint Tropez. And his offers are not to be refused. Carmen Martinez Ruiz, a Monte Carlo proprietor, can testify to that: 15 of his goons, having run out of arguments, trashed the interior of her establishment, inflicting Fr600,000 worth of damages, before threatening to rape and then kill her. "An Arab gang has begun to make a habit of intimidating and molesting the populace, but only Mrs. Martinez Ruiz has dared to file a complaint," local police sadly admit, albeit without alluding in any way to the role of the Syrian president.

What is the source of the capital used to build his real estate empire? DST's official line is that large sums of money must have been put into Rif'at's hands when he left Syria, in exchange for his withdrawal from the political scene. "That's not true! The vice president left Damascus without a cent, and Syria cut off our water," says a spokesman for the exile. "Later, assistance and subsidies arrived. You must understand that I cannot give you names...but I can assure you his fortune is considerably overestimated. Bank financing has been

required for almost all our real estate transactions. The Marbella project, for example, was financed in its entirety by the banks."

In Jerusalem and Washington, one gets a very different story: It is said that the bulk of the lucre accumulated by Rif'at actually comes from poppy cultivation, which since Syrian troops began to occupy Lebanon has transformed the al-Biqa' plain into one of the world's principal centers for the production of heroin and cocaine. "Part of his income may be from legal sources, but most of his commercial activity consists of collecting commissions on arms sales and drug trafficking," according to a confidential report in the hands of Israeli intelligence. Its authors note that between 1976 and the mid-1980's, the Syrian president's brother exerted a predominant influence over the northern al-Biqa', where the defense forces of the 569th Division, then under his command, were deployed. These forces controlled the production zones and with the help of Christian militias protected drugs being transported to the Lebanese ports of Tripoli, Beirut, and Juniyah, where they were embarked on vessels bound for Europe and the United States.

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The Lebanese Connection

According to Israeli experts, there is not the shadow of a doubt: It was the Syrian presence that helped make Lebanon one of the world's main centers for the production of illicit drugs (hashish, cocaine, and heroin). In a confidential report, they attempt to demonstrate that Syria is involved at every stage of trafficking operations, which according to American sources bring close to a billion dollars into the Syrian treasury every year. Rif'at al-Asad and his entourage are not the only ones involved. The authors of the report also give the names of about 20 high-ranking officers who are compromised to varying degrees: issuing travel permits to notorious traffickers, collecting transport and export "taxes," or even owning an interest in vessels used for drug trafficking.

Two of Rif'at's principal adversaries are high on the list. One is the minister of defense, General Talas, accused of having issued hundreds and hundreds of documents allowing big dealers to circulate freely in Lebanon and Syria (a sample is attached to the report). The other is 'Ali Duba, who as head of the army's special services allegedly forced Syrian and Lebanese bigwigs with whom he was in contact to pay through the nose for his protection and for freedom of movement in Lebanon, which was guaranteed by Gen. Kan'an, his deputy in the occupied country (another document attached). Finally, a half dozen Ba'th officials are feeding at the same trough.

The Israeli services are convinced the machinery is fully institutionalized, the outgrowth of a deliberate policy pursued by Hafiz to strengthen his grip on Lebanon and on the men who serve him. Controlling the traffic means controlling the men and factions on the ground. It means

assuring the cooperation of numerous Lebanese personalities linked to the drug industry (from which profits account for 40 percent of Lebanon's GNP [gross national product]). It means being able, at any time, to "cut off the water" of militias and terrorist organizations who live there. It means, finally, being in a position to exert pressure on Syrian civilian and military officials who have enriched themselves on the traffic.

In addition to these political benefits, the Syrian regime gets foreign exchange earnings and is able to cut the cost of maintaining its forces in Lebanon. From high-ranking officer to humble foot-soldier, everyone is "on the take," a fact that compensates for the low pay and helps buoy troop morale. But other benefits, according to the Israelis, include counternarcotics funds dispensed to Syria by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf states. Since 1987, the Syrian Army has partially destroyed several poppy fields in the al-Biqa' valley. According to Israel, however, these operations were either spurious or media hype. James Baker, the then-U.S. secretary of state, was personally invited to attend one of these media events, where fields were destroyed only after being harvested and in such a way that poppies could flourish again the following year. The United States vowed to have nothing further to do with such operations. So Hafiz upped the ante. It will now take millions more dollars to reconvert the al-Biqa' to its traditional crops. [end box]

Over time, under cover of the occupation, northern Lebanon became a crossroads for all sorts of smuggling operations. "Contraband products—among them drugs and deluxe autos—were transported to Lebanese ports and special markets in Damascus in convoys of military vehicles belonging to the 569th, sometimes even by helicopter," say the Israeli experts, who bluntly accuse Rif'at of having sold guarantees and protection to top Lebanese traffickers. The same report also contains information on two of the vice president's sons, Firas and Durayd. "Firas was implicated in drug trafficking between the al-Biqa' and Europe. The network encompassed Paris, Marseille, and the south of France. Besides importing Lebanese drugs, he exported stolen vehicles (principally Mercedes and BMW) to Lebanon, and from there to Syria and other countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states."

Also, still according to the Israelis, relying partly on Interpol files, some of the drugs transited through Spain, with the complicity of Syrian diplomats. In Italy, finally, Firas's men allegedly worked in close collaboration with the Mafia, which among other things was responsible for selling the merchandise on the American market. Durayd, the second son, who did not follow the family into exile, reportedly has opened several import-export offices in Damascus that specialize in buying and selling contraband products. And he reportedly maintains business ties to "mid-level and big-time Lebanese dealers," whom the Israelis conscientiously list one by one: Tariq Fakhr-al-Din, Suhayl Hamadah, 'Ali and Muhammad 'Id, Bassam Matraji, 'Ali al-Zayn, and 'Ali Ja'far.

In the United States, it was not until the end of the Gulf war that Washington publicly noted Syrian involvement in the Lebanese trafficking, which was detailed in DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] reporting. Last spring, as the Americans were negotiating (for an enormous amount of money) destruction of the al-Biq'a poppy fields under Syrian auspices, Marvin Levitsky, assistant secretary of state for narcotics affairs, abruptly waded into the issue with both feet, asserting among other things that Rif'at is the major purveyor of Lebanese dope to Europe. DEA agents reportedly have obtained proof that Firas has his own poppy fields in Lebanon; and they have videotape and bank records showing the active role of the Rif'at family in the traffic. Among other things, the family reportedly is supported by the Christian al-Maradah militia under the orders of the "Franjiyah clan."

All this information, obviously, has been brought to the attention of French intelligence. However, officials in both the Directorate of Customs and the Central Antinarcotics Office maintain they have no proof of Syrian involvement in supplying the French market. "True, there is some talk of drugs in connection with Rif'at. There's doubtless also a bit of arms trafficking," one of Mitterrand's close collaborators nonchalantly concedes. So what? The fact that a foreign political official might be directing—from French soil—an international drug trafficking network is but a "minor detail" where reasons of state are concerned. Dr. al-Asad clearly is involved in importing and exporting—though no one seems really to know precisely what commodities are bought and sold. But His Excellency has a diplomatic passport, so neither customs officials nor the Air and Border Police (PAF) stationed at Le Bourget airport have dared to inspect the contents of the baggage that fills the holds of his two private Boeing 727s....

Since the late 1970's, each government in turn has shown "our friend Rif'at" similar indulgence. Scrupulously respecting the terms of the "contract" concluded, it is said, back when Gaston Defferre was still riding high at Place Beauvau, the government of Jacques Chirac granted him virtual extraterritorial status. It was an application of what one political official of the time called the notion of a movable "island of immunity." Rif'at and his men can move freely, with arms and baggage, using false passports whenever they choose. No one interferes in their private affairs. All that matters is that Hafiz and Khaddam (a perennial rival who has escaped three assassination attempts) must not engage in any score settling on French soil. As for the rest... "We weren't about to create a lot of headaches for ourselves for the sake of high principles!" a former minister from the cohabitation era admits soberly.

And there were plenty of good reasons for both left and right to take that position. Rif'at is readily credited for his presumed role in the "cessation of terrorist attacks" preceding Mitterrand's trip to Damascus, and soon afterward in the bargaining to obtain the release of French hostages held in Lebanon. "He is no saint, but he has

honored all his commitments, from A to Z," says a former emissary of Mitterrand, who at one point intervened with Pierre Joxe to secure the release of a handful of Syrians arrested in a vehicle packed with arms... "We tolerated the presence of armed guards and covered up several pieces of Syrian mischief, because they were not disruptive of public order," explains a confidant of Jacques Chirac. "But each month without a terrorist attack was a month well worth the price..."

On 26 December 1988, however, before the Highway A7 affair had been "shelved," a new threat to public order made its appearance. But once again, the police and judiciary found pursuit blocked by reasons of state. The time: 0830. The place: the underground parking lot of the Orphee tower. One Muhammad al-Hammud was preparing to get out of his car when he was attacked by a masked man armed with a knife—a Rostfred with a 38-centimeter blade. A former lieutenant with the paratroopers, al-Hammud still had fast reflexes. He escaped with just a few stitches....

The same evening, a previously unknown organization contacted AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE to claim responsibility for the attack: the "Mute Brigade," Marwan Hadid group—named for a Muslim Brotherhood leader executed in 1977. The anonymous caller added to his English-language message a "warning" to Rif'at al-Asad: "It's a special punishment."

Crime Squad bloodhounds left that aside and focused their efforts on learning more about the victim. Al-Hammud obtained a residence permit on 27 October 1988. He had served in a unit commanded by Rif'at, who invited him to join up with him in France and gave him an annual salary of Fr20,000. Al-Hammud among other things worked on the notorious radio station clandestinely relayed from the roof of the building. He also worked for the newspaper AL-FURSAN. In the apartment that he shared with his wife and two young children, investigators found official Syrian seals—from the emigration division of the Ministry of External Affairs, from the Ministry of Education, and from the Syrian consulate in Geneva—as well as a rubber stamp stolen in late 1985 from the cultural center of the French Embassy in Damascus. They also seized a book of blank export sales forms issued by the Customs Directorate. The appointments book of al-Hammud, who did not recognize his attacker, contained numerous addresses in Damascus and Marbella, a few in Malaga, the addresses and phone numbers of Firas al-Asad in London and Geneva, and those of the Jarakat family and Mu'in Nasif, Rif'at's son-in-law. But the first significant clue was furnished by Colonel Jabir Salih. This individual, who is responsible for the installation of telephones and electronic devices at Rif'at al-Asad's residences, told police that a major robbery had occurred at the complex on 2 November.

Each month, accompanied by a driver and bodyguard, Shakirah Yusuf, a paratrooper in Rif'at's entourage, went to the Audi bank to withdraw Fr200-300,000 in

cash, stuffing it into a Samsonite suitcase. Then he returned to his apartment in "Citroen city," where a colleague, Fadhia Hasan, took charge of disbursing salaries. It was during such a disbursement that on 2 November 1988 two masked men burst into the room and made off with the Fr230,000 payroll.

Al-Hammud pointed the finger at one Ja'far Haydar, who taught mathematics to Rif'at's children. At the time of the robbery, Haydar had just quit, giving up both his Fr20,000 per month salary and the apartment that went with it. He was quickly found, at 36 Quai des Orfèvres. He had quit his job, he said, only because of the "unwholesome ambiance" that prevailed there. "My brothers were starting to come under harassment in Syria," he explained. "In Damascus, people working for the vice president are considered opponents. I feared the Syrian regime would put pressure on me to work as a 'mole' in the group.... Besides that, thefts were occurring constantly in the complex, even in Rif'at's children's safe."

Ja'far Haydar shed some interesting new light on the life of the small Syrian community, but there was nothing to connect him to the 2 November theft—much less the attempt on al-Hammud's life. Once his wounds had healed, the latter was interrogated at greater length. It was learned that he directed the activities of the intelligence officers on the delegation. It was in that capacity that he was told by "the boss" to find the perpetrator of the robbery. True, he had put forward the name of Ja'far Haydar, but Haydar was only one of seven suspects on the list, three of whom were sent "manu militari" back to Syria after their residence permits were confiscated. But the investigation took another turn: On leaving the hospital, al-Hammud was contacted by two Tunisians. Employed as sales clerks in a fruit and vegetable shop in Puteaux, they claimed to have been recruited in December to assassinate him! Al-Hammud showed them a group of photographs. The Tunisians immediately identified Ibrahim Maqsd, the driver working for Nasif, Rif'at's son-in-law. Maqsd supposedly offered them Fr10,000 to "get at a man who was responsible for the firing of his wife and trying to force his attentions on her." He also allegedly proposed that they pick up a valise filled with money (some Fr40,000) to be left at the entrance to a bank. At the last moment, they said, they backed out...

After reporting these allegations personally to Rif'at, al-Hammud took them to the Crime Squad. There, he bluntly accused Nasif. The latter was supposedly jealous of his prerogatives and the confidence "the boss" evinced toward him. "He wanted everything to go through him; and he saw me as his rival." An amusing footnote: After the attack, Nasif allegedly tried to make amends with an offer of cash.

Maqsd was brought in for questioning on 14 March 1989. Accused of attempted murder, he and his Lebanese female companion were immediately locked up.

Earlier, investigators had monitored several of the couple's telephone conversations. "The higher-ups know what's happening and will do what's necessary," the young Lebanese told her friends. Maqsd too seemed to believe he would be protected. And in fact both were soon released. Once again, friends in high places had intervened. The case began to bog down. The police became more and more intrigued by al-Hammud. They learned he had regular contacts with prominent individuals in the Syrian regime. But when they heard him referring to the "old man"—meaning President Hafiz al-Asad—in quite affectionate terms, they couldn't make heads or tails of it. Who was al-Hammud really working for?

Nearly two years elapsed. On 14 May 1991, a letter convinced the judge to reopen the case. The author, describing himself as a journalist for AL-FURSAN, asserted that the attack was carried out by Col. Jadid at Nasif's behest. The two men had worked together for a long time, he explained. And when he had been an officer in the Revolutionary Defense Brigades, it was to Col. Jadid that Nasif turned to carry out particularly delicate missions. "He is a first-class killer," he said, "and he has more than eight groups in Europe."

A second letter further blackened Nasif's name. Signed by one of Rif'at's former driver-bodyguards and sent from Syria, it was dated 16 October 1991. "I was shown the door in April 1989 because I failed to execute the orders of Col. Jadid," wrote the author, before recounting the tale of his misadventures. One night, it seems, the colonel had called a meeting in his Quai Citroen apartment of everyone who had been summoned by the Crime Squad as a witness. There, he allegedly ordered them to blame the attack on al-Hammud, to attribute it to "personal motives," and to say Maqsd was working for Rif'at, not Nasif. After all, who could want to attack "the boss"?

Col. Jadid left unanswered the summonses sent him by the Crime Squad. Rif'at's son-in-law demurred, citing his diplomatic status. Judge Humetz, in charge of investing this delicate case, probably felt people were trying to serve him up a scapegoat on a platter. But he was determined to get to the bottom of it. He obstinately summoned Nasif again to testify on 24 January 1992. In vain.

Once again, Rif'at's intimates behaved as if they were above the law, assured of impunity, and responsible to no one but their "chief." But the climate has changed. Early last summer, the delegation's numbers fell by more than half. Some returned home, while others left Paris for Egypt. Could it be that French authorities were cracking down at last? According to Raoul Wechstein, the technical adviser to whom Pierre Joxe had assigned the Syrian dossier, the Ministry of Interior had imposed on Rif'at's men a very strict code of good behavior, stipulating that any excesses would henceforth trigger revocation of residence permits and—something new—

weapons could be carried only by authorization (reportedly, just eight permits were issued). The same message was conveyed by Pierre Puyrenier, the civilian administrator responsible for sensitive cases at the police prefecture, one of whose responsibilities is to monitor compliance with the conditions for the delegation's residency on French soil (except for the vice president, who enjoys diplomatic status). Draconian conditions were imposed in exchange for renewal of residency permits, which is why the staff was pared back to 72.

At the same time as France was becoming less "easygoing," Dr. al-Asad himself seemed to be having some financial problems. Perhaps it was the result of unlucky investments, such as the purchase of 20 percent of the stock of Eurotunnel, the price of which, after climbing to almost Fr120, dropped back to Fr28.5. However that may be, after the departure of part of his "retinue," the apartments of "Citroen City" were put up for rent. Those at Quai Kennedy also: at rates ranging from Fr40-60,000 per month—all costs included—for a three-room apartment of 130-160 square meters with a view overlooking the Seine. The houses on Avenue Lamballe and Avenue Foch Square have been boarded shut. Both are up for sale. According to informed sources, Rif'at is even thinking about getting rid of 38 Avenue Foch. Of course, the prices asked are so high that one might well ask if he is seriously seeking buyers. In any case, all this real estate has been a heavy burden. It was also responsible for several distressingly large bills from the Directorate of Imposts, which dunned him for Fr30 million—a "bill" that, after haggling and compromise, reportedly was reduced to 1.2 million, partly in exchange for Syria's purchase of...100,000 French chickens!

Some read these signs as presaging an early departure and believed Rif'at meant to liquidate his holdings before falling back on Cairo, where he was seen with increasing frequency. Several of his men acquired housing in the stylish quarters of the Egyptian capital or real estate on the isle of Zamalek. But supporters maintained he had only one aim: to return to his homeland with his head held high.

On 21 July 1992, Syria was in mourning. Na'isah, mother of Hafiz al-Asad, had just died in the small family village of al-Qardahah perched on the heights of Latakia. Every evening for 40 days, television broadcasts showed more of the interminable procession of officials and friends—Syrians and foreigners—who came to offer their condolences to the leader. But these solemn public rites were marked above all by the first public reappearance of Rif'at since his noisy return in 1984. An informal reappearance, to which the Syrian media carefully refrained from making any allusion.

Rather quickly, though, it became apparent that this discreet presence could not be explained solely by the Na'isah's obsequies. Beginning in September, without speeches or fanfare, Rif'at was restored to his vice presidential responsibilities for coordinating the activities of all the intelligence services. Around the building

that houses his renovated offices—a tall, slender bunker built in the heart of Damascus—the "moukhabarat" resumed their sentry duty. Entrenched in his headquarters or withdrawn to one of his numerous residences in al-Mazzah, a serene and isolated residential quarter far from downtown, Rif'at does not appear at official meetings, abandoning the field to his counterpart, 'Abd-al-Halim Khaddam. This self-effacement, surprising to say the least in this man who had accustomed Damascenes to a higher profile, would seem to give credence to the cunning rumor that Rif'at, having been brushed off by all the intelligence chiefs, finds himself "very isolated and no longer has any margin for maneuver." All the same, he is hiring people and gradually reconstituting his team, to all appearances fully committed to taking back the reins of the "services."

Hafiz seems to have pardoned him. But, contrary to the official version and the explanations tendered in some diplomatic circles, it was not Na'isah's death that brought about the reunion of the al-Asad family; this resulted rather from two years of discreet negotiations, in the course of which the two brothers agreed on the conditions for his return. Basil, the supreme leader's oldest son, had made many trips for this reason to Europe, and more recently to Egypt. A meeting of the principals themselves reportedly was held, with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia serving as host, and it was at this meeting that peace was formally restored in the family. For Hafiz, it had become imperative to restore an image tarnished by the excesses committed at Latakia by some of his nephews by marriage—attacks, rapes, arms trafficking—and to strengthen the clan vis-a-vis the generals.

It is not by idle whim that Hafiz styles himself "Abu-Basil" (father of Basil) or that he organizes the wholesale distribution of posters and key rings bearing the likeness of his son the "dauphin." But several powerful men in the regime disapprove his choice, considering Basil as a mere "stripling," a spoiled brat. A covert opposition, which Hafiz is trying artfully to break. On 1 July, for example, many members of the military hierarchy were reappointed only for a six-month period, rather than for a year as is customary.

Were the need to arise, Rif'at could again lead troops into battle. But there are also negotiations under way within the framework of the peace conference. For Hafiz, the negotiating skills and business connections of his younger brother are assets of real value. And the latter is indeed well placed to work for a rapprochement with the Saudis. He also has the ear of the new Lebanese head of government, Rafiq al-Harir. Advantages well worth the risk of a few disagreements.

Rif'at maintains excellent relations with his nephew Basil. But will he be satisfied with the role of guardian and tutor? Will his enemies of yesteryear give him any elbow room? Shortly before his return last June, the al-Fursan quarter, where his former soldiers and their families live, was the site of confrontations with the presidential guard. A number of people were wounded,

some perhaps fatally. Officially, it was a question of "cleaning up" the area—a mecca for black-market operations. But Rifat probably interpreted the attack correctly as a declaration of war.

Although Rifat's powers have been restored, the family has not neglected its business interests. His sons are making investments left and right, particularly in the hotel sector. Durayd owns the al-Siwar, a very kitschy restaurant built on the pier at Latakia. Mudar runs the Sahara, a sumptuous gastronomical establishment in the al-Mazzah quarter of Damascus. As for young Sumar, he has turned the former premises of the monthly AL-FURSAN into the Nady Sumar, a large store devoted to the body beautiful: dietetic foods, beauty products, and work-out equipment for bodybuilding adepts.

Will France be rid of this troublesome family once and for all? The al-Asad brothers are far too unpredictable to say. Roland Dumas's trip to Damascus and the recent visit to France of his Syrian counterpart, Faruq al-Shara', bespeak a real and new warming of relations between the two countries. It is not certain that "our friend Rifat" had anything to do with it. But what of that? For his "supporters," this resumption of Franco-Syrian dialogue is occurring at just the right time to justify the silences and the incredible protections he has enjoyed for more than 10 years. In defiance of all ethical considerations, and in contempt of the law.

TUNISIA

Stagnation of Democratization Effort Cited

93AF0510A Paris LE MONDE in French 12 Apr 93 p 1

[Unattributed article: "Democratic Deficit in Tunisia"]

[Text] Tunis is far, very far, from Algiers. "The economy is doing well; the atmosphere is relaxed and serene," the present government pleads. Nevertheless, some 200 local personalities, including an assistant general secretary of the Tunisian General Federation of Labor [UGTT] and the dean of the Tunisian Medical Association, feel so ill at ease in their own country that, courageously, they just launched an appeal to "all democratic forces" to fight "domination by the party-state."

The "medical" coup against Habib Bourguiba engineered by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 7 November 1987 led people to hope for a more relaxed political life. The rise of Islamism imposed other priorities on the new government. After attempting to come to terms with "Allah's madmen," the successor of the "Supreme Fighter" engaged in a merciless struggle against them, without excessive concern for human rights; this struggle is now bearing fruit. Tunisia—this is no small achievement—is experiencing neither bombings nor violence.

This struggle mobilized all of the government's energies, nourished all its fears and all its fantasies. As a result, the people are still craving for the "change" that Mr. Ben Ali

has promised for so long. The country is still under the somewhat anachronistic domination of a party whose chairman is the chief of state. The existence of seven legally recognized political formations, over 5,000 associations, and 120 publications does not make the slightest difference, because none of them has much room to maneuver.

In Tunisia, the democrats who, as the need arises, are readily suspected of "being in touch with foreign powers," or in league with the Islamists, or quite simply assumed to be "embittered clique members," pace about like caged animals. If their appeal is a sign, it is a sign of considerable confusion in the face of a deadlocked situation.

Mr. Ben Ali and his friends are fully aware of the feelings of a large segment of public opinion that extends beyond—far beyond—the narrow circles of the Tunis intelligentsia. Therefore, they would like to change the voting system so that the next Parliament, issued from the legislative elections of March 1994, will not be all of one color. But, considering the present state of decrepitude of the opposition formations, in view of the omnipotence of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RDC), which is the ruling party, can they play more than minor parts?

Although the Islamists have been made to toe the line, the government continues to fear that they will take advantage of everything, especially democracy—since the economy is healthy—to reappear some day in a new guise, in the limelight. A poor excuse that may condemn Tunisia to remain forever a not particularly democratic state.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Government Budget Figures Announced

Few Planned Projects Completed

93AE0418A London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 11 Mar 93 p 11

[Report from Abu Dhabi: "UAE Allocates 2.7 Billion Dirhams for 1992; Federal Project Implementation Deteriorates to 31 Percent"]

[Text] The Abu Dhabi Ministry of Planning emphasized that project implementation in the UAE [United Arab Emirates] fell short of its target last year.

The ministry yesterday released a report on the performance level of implementing UAE projects in 1992 [as published], especially those supervised by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works. The report said that "the ratio of implementation amounted to about 31.7 percent of all projects planned."

The report, prepared by the Ministry of Planning's Oversight Department, said that actual costs for ongoing and new projects carried out by the Ministry of

Housing and Public Works in 1992 amounted to about 2.784 billion dirhams and that actual expenditures for that purpose amounted by the end of 1992 to 856.3 million dirhams. This makes for an implementation ratio of about 31 percent.

The report also disclosed that the implementation ratio of federal projects undertaken by six ministries were, successively, 1 percent, 2 percent, 10 percent, 20 percent, 23 percent, and 27 percent. Implementation ratios were 85 percent in the health sector, 65 percent in education, and even higher in some other sectors.

The report said that some ministries undertake certain projects directly, without oversight by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, and that those projects last year cost 1.966 billion dirhams, of which only 458.8 million dirhams were disbursed by year-end. This makes for an actual implementation and completion ratio of about 23 percent.

Most of the completed projects were in the electricity and water sector, which was allocated 401 million dirhams. This represents 87.4 percent of total expenditures on projects carried out by the various ministries on their own, or 97 percent of the [total] funds allocated.

The Ministry of Planning emphasized that the decline in implementation ratios of Ministry of Public Works' projects resulted from the escalating the number of new federal government projects, which had been halted for more than five years, putting pressure on the Ministry of Housing and Public Works in various areas ranging from design planning to project completion oversight.

The ministry added in its report that supervising project implementation requires adequate structures in the ministries concerned and also mandates overcoming administrative and fiscal restraints that cause more-efficient contractors to abstain from undertaking projects at this period in time.

The ministry attributed the decline in on-going project implementation ratios to several factors common both to the ministries concerned and to the ministries in charge of implementation, as well as to consulting and contracting companies. Such factors include delays in site selection and changing site locations, as well as noncompletion of studies and designs.

It added that implementation of other projects lagged because of delays in tendering them and awarding their contracts, slow implementation, project suspensions, and sometimes even the firing of contractors.

The report noted a tendency to modify projects or add to them during the implementation stage, which means that they would take longer to complete. Low implementation ratios are also attributed to the fact that no sites were specified for many of the projects awarded in 1992. For instance, 391 popular housing contracts were awarded in 1992, but contractors are yet to be assigned sites.

Deficit 1.7 Billion Dirhams

93AE0418B London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
11 Mar 93 p 12

[Report from Abu Dhabi by Taj-al-Din 'Abd-al-Haq: "A 17.6 Billion Dirham Budget With a 1.7 Billion Deficit; UAE Budget Issued Without National Council Ratification"]

[Text] A 17.6 billion dirham UAE [United Arab Emirates] Federal budget, with a deficit of 1.7 billion dirhams, was announced in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

The budget announcement pointed out that the special budgetary decree issued by head of state Shaykh Zayid Bin-Sultan Al Nuhayyan does not need passage by the Federal National Council (parliament) because it apparently antedates the decree convening the Council. The implication is that the budget decree was issued in the absence of the National Council and the government is therefore not constitutionally bound to submit it to the Council.

Even though this may raise some eyebrows at the Federal National Council, it is clear that the government did not intend by that constitutional scenario to slight the Council, but to save time and announce the budget early in keeping with the trend of the past two years, which has been to announce the budget much earlier than in it was announced the 1980's, when budgets were sometimes issued only a week to a few days before the end of the fiscal.

The budget had been approved by the UAE Council of Ministers last 10 January and submitted to Al Nuhayyan for ratification and for the promulgation of the relevant decree.

At the time, the Council of Ministers' approval of the budget was considered a precedent and an indication that the government was keen on complying with the constitutional provisions that require it to issue the budget by the start of the new fiscal year.

The UAE federal budget puts expenditures at 17.63 billion dirhams and revenues at 15.91 billion dirhams, leaving a deficit of 1.72 billion dinars. This compares with a budgetary deficit of 1.46 billion dinars last year, when expenditures were budgeted at 17.3 billion dinars.

Finance experts believe that the early budget announcement could ameliorate the rate of government expenditure. The deficits anticipated by successive budgets over the past 10 or so years have so far been theoretical only because budgets were announced too late for government agencies to be able to expend all of the allocations.

It is not known if the early release of the budget will turn its hypothetical budget deficit into a reality, because various ministries and government agencies have ample time to exhaust budgetary allocations.

Experts say it is too early to identify the manner in which the deficit will be covered, should it actually materialize.

In the few cases [in the past] when certain agencies experienced shortages of funds, their deficits were covered either by shuffling [tapping other] allocations or by issuing special budgetary supplements.

Even though an actual deficit is a possibility, government sources do not expect the UAE to resort to borrowing either on foreign or on domestic markets as neighboring Gulf countries do.

Sources indicate that although the UAE, by virtue of its vast economic resources and financial reserves, would have access to foreign and domestic credit, an actual budgetary deficit would be [more likely] covered by increasing the budgetary contributions of the various member-emirates.

The UAE Government has never resorted to external borrowing, but the local governments of the federated emirates have borrowed on foreign capital markets in order to finance service and development projects.

According to Ahmad Humayyid al-Ta'ir, minister of state for finance and industry, the new [UAE] budget allocates 1.1 billion dirhams for projects and 16.4 billion dirhams for ordinary current [operating] expenditures, including 5.7 billion dirhams for salaries and wages.

He said that the majority of projects [allocations] went to service ministries. Ministry of Education projects are allocated 200 million dirhams. Public works projects are allocated 350 million dirhams; electricity projects, 256 million dirhams; maintenance operations, 67 million; and Interior Ministry projects, 62 million dirhams.

Commercial Bank Budget

93AE0418C London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 19 Mar 93 p 12

[Report from Abu Dhabi by Shafiq al-Asadi: "Combined Budget of UAE Commercial Banks Rose Last Year to \$41.8 Billion"]

[Text] The combined budget of commercial banks in the UAE rose by 6,456 billion dirhams, or 4.3 percent, from 147,481 billion dirhams (about \$40 billion) in December of 1991 to 153,937 billion dirhams (around \$41.8 billion) by the end of 1992.

The combined banking budget has been rising since the end of the Gulf crisis, which caused it to decline to less than 115 billion dirhams at the end of 1990. The budget began to pursue an upward curve as funds flowed back into the UAE and other countries of the region after the crisis was over. By the end of last December, the combined budget of commercial banks in the UAE had reached its highest level since the inception of banking activity in 1946.

The combined commercial bank budget was announced in a statistical bulletin issued yesterday by the Central Bank in Abu Dhabi. The bulletin dealt with various financial, monetary, economic, and banking developments in the UAE in 1992 in comparison with the year preceding.

The Central Bank disclosed for the first time that domestic banks (190 institutions) with combined budgets of 116.882 billion dirhams (\$31.7 billion) accounted for about 75.9 percent of all combined budgets of commercial banks in the UAE, in comparison with 113.436 billion dirhams (\$30.8 billion) in December of 1991. Domestic banks accounted for 3,446 billion dirhams of the total increase in the combined budget of commercial banks in the 1991-92 statistical period.

The Central Bank said that foreign commercial banks in the UAE had a total combined budget of 37,055 billion dirhams (about \$9.2 billion) by the end of last December.

The Central Bank's statistical bulletin, of which AL-HAYAH obtained a copy, included a full analysis of assets in the combined budgets of commercial banks in the UAE. The bulletin reported that the value of cash and deposits with the Central Bank rose from 6.635 billion to 8.603 billion dirhams in the 1991-92 period as resident bank balances climbed from 4,207 billion to 5,810 billion dirhams. Foreign assets, meanwhile, declined from 70,271 billion to 68,501 billion dirhams as a direct consequence of the decline of foreign bank balances from 51,990 billion to 50,067 billion dirhams.

The Central Bank emphasized that the value of domestic credit and investments rose during the same statistical period from 63,511 to 68,146 billion dirhams, mainly as a result of an increase in credit facilities from 52,865 billion to 53,466 billion dirhams thanks to the expansion of loans and open withdrawals from 45,073 billion to 48,311 billion dirhams.

The bank also pointed out that the obligations of other financial institutions climbed from 1,082 billion to 1,338 billion dirhams. Domestic investments shot up from 646 million dirhams to 1,119 billion dirhams as other assets increased from 2,857 billion to 2,877 billion dirhams.

The Central Bank further disclosed that the value of cash deposits with commercial banks operating in the UAE rose from 8,336 billion to 9,873 billion dirhams as a result of an increase in on-demand local currency deposits from 8,091 billion to 9,697 billion dirhams and of a decline in the value of bank checks from 245 million to 167 million dirhams.

The value of semi-liquid deposits likewise climbed from 53,464 billion to 54,564 billion dirhams and of foreign settlements from 26,268 million to 26,566 billion dirhams. Meanwhile, borrowing from the government

shrank from 307 million to 282 million dirhams and Central Bank balances contracted from 931 million to 72 million dirhams.

The Central Bank also revealed that commercial bank capitals and reserves rose during this statistical period from 16.107 billion to 17.883 billion dirhams. Resident bank receivables increased from 4.402 billion to 5.953 billion dirhams, and other settlements grew from 27.047 billion to 28.736 billion dirhams.

The Central Bank also disclosed that the organizational accounts of UAE commercial banks increased in the 1991-92 period from 91.819 billion to 101.424 billion dirhams as a result of an increase in letter of credit values from 22.608 billion to 22.912 billion dirhams and an increase in the value of other collateral and security deposits from 20.847 billion to 22.912 billion dirhams. The value of contracts for the sale and purchase of foreign currencies also climbed from 31.057 billion to 31.402 billion dirhams and value of other accounts soared from 1.7307 billion to 2.3111 billion dirhams.

Trade Balance Down

93AE0418D London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 19 Mar 93
p 13

[Report from Abu Dhabi by Shafiq al-Asadi: "UAE Balance of Trade Drops by 8.20 Percent"]

[Text] The UAE [United Arab Emirates] trade surplus dropped 8.20 percent by the end of 1992 to 21.8 billion dirhams (about \$5.92 billion) from 30.20 billion dirhams (about \$8.20 billion) a year earlier. The shrinking surplus is attributed to a decline in UAE oil revenues coupled with higher outlays for imports and a relative rise in non-oil exports.

Reports by the Central Bank in Abu Dhabi indicate that the value of UAE oil exports declined last year to 51.60 billion dirhams (about \$14.0 billion) from 52.7 billion dirhams (about \$14.3 billion) in 1991. The value of gas exports stabilized at 4.20 billion dirhams (\$1.14 billion) in both years under review.

The Central Bank said in a report released yesterday, of which AL-HAYAH obtained a copy, that the value of other exports and re-exports from the UAE increased substantially to 30 billion dirhams (\$8.15 billion) from 24.4 billion dirhams (\$6.6 billion) in 1991. The aggregate value of UAE exports and re-exports climbed to 85.5 billion dirhams (\$23.31 billion) in 1992 from 81.3 billion dirhams (\$22.09 billion) a year earlier.

The value of UAE imports also increased in 1992 to 64 billion dirhams (\$17.3 billion) from 51.1 billion dirhams (\$14 billion) in 1991.

The Bank estimated UAE imports in the second quarter of 1992 at 15.3 billion dirhams, down slightly from 15.4 billion dirhams a year earlier. Imports through Abu

Dhabi accounted for 2.9 billion dirhams; through Dubai, 11.4 billion; and through al-Shariqah 925.5 million dirhams.

The value of re-exports in the second quarter of last year amounted to about 3.3 billion dirhams of which re-exports from Abu Dhabi accounted for 946 million dirhams; re-exports from Dubai accounted for 2.1 billion, and re-exports from al-Shariqah for 162 million dirhams.

UAE imports from Western countries and certain industrialized nations during last year's second quarter accounted for 63 percent, or 9.671 billion dirhams in total imports during the quarter. Imports from Japan [during the same quarter] amounted to 2.549 billion dirhams, or 16.6 percent; from the United Kingdom, 1.188 billion dirhams, or 7.8 percent; from the United States, 1.548 billion dirhams, or 10.1 percent; from Germany, 1.043 billion dirhams, or 6.8 percent; from France, 792.9 million dirhams, or 5.2 percent; and from Italy, 689 million dirhams, or 4.5 percent.

UAE imports [text missing] during the second quarter of 1992 are valued at 1.859 billion dirhams, or 12.1 percent. Imports from Eastern Europe and China [during the quarter] amounted to 1.060 billion dirhams, of which imports from China, valued at 950 million dirhams, accounted for 6.2 percent.

Imports from Arab countries [during the same period] amounted to 764.2 million dirhams, or 5 percent, of which imports from GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] states are valued at 534.9 million dirhams. Imports from certain Asian countries amounted to 3.520 billion dirhams, or 23 percent of the value of [total] imports, of which imports from India accounted for 771 million dirhams; from South Korea, 696 million dirhams; from Taiwan, 418 million dirhams; and from other nations, 290 million dirhams.

Ministry Allocations

93AE0418E London AL-HAYAH in Arabic 29 Mar 93
p 13

[Report from Dubai: "Public Works and Education Get the Lion's Share. Investment Incentives Go to 7 UAE Ministries"]

[Text] Seven UAE [United Arab Emirates] federal ministries received the majority of costs and allocations under the current public investment program.

The Ministries of Education, Electricity and Water, Housing and Public Works, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Communications, and Information and Culture were allocated 85.9 percent of total investment program costs, amounting to about 900 million dirhams (\$272 million). The same ministries accounted for 82.3 percent of investment program [allocations] last year.

A report by the UAE Ministry of Planning indicates that the Ministry of Public Works this year received the

highest allocations of [funds set aside] for projects to be carried out by ministries and agencies under the current investment program. Public Works, which ranked second in last year's investment program, was allocated 352.7 million dirhams, or 31.4 percent of all appropriations under the current general program. This is an increase of 127.3 million dirhams from 225.4 million dirhams last year.

Project costs declined this year to about 990 million dirhams, or 21.2 percent of the aggregate cost of investment program projects. This compares with 21.3 percent a year earlier.

Maintenance allocations for Ministry of Interior projects dropped from 40 million dirhams in 1992 to 17 million dirhams this year. This amount represents the actual [value of] Ministry of Public Works commitment to Interior Ministry projects in need of maintenance. The remaining 23 million dirhams in costs under that item were included in the allocations for projects to be undertaken by the Interior Ministry on its own behalf in accordance with Council of Ministers Decree No. 4/99 of 1992, which directs the Interior Ministry to undertake the maintenance of existing buildings.

The report noted that allocations for studies related to the construction of the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Complex declined from 10 million dirhams last year to a mere 3 million dirhams this year. The only project whose funding increased this year is the Umm-al-Qaywayn shore-protection project. Appropriations for that project increased from 2 million dirhams last year to 7 million dirhams in accordance with Council of Ministers Resolution No. 151/6 of 1992.

The report indicated that this year's appropriations for the Ministry of Housing and Public Works are targeted for a group of on-going projects and include 225 million dirhams for the completion of 2,000 low-cost housing units, 55 million dirhams to complete a project for additional civilian residential units, 41.6 million dirhams to complete a projects for road maintenance in the country, 52 million dirhams for maintaining and repairing government buildings and installations, 4 million dirhams to complete the building of 446 residential units and 50 units in 'Ajman, 1.1 million dirhams for shore-protection and maintenance in Umm-al-Qaywayn, and 1 million dirhams for studies, works, and designs related to the Ministerial Complex in Abu Dhabi.

The Ministry of Electricity and Water received the second-highest appropriation for its new and on-going projects for which the current investment program allocates about 256.4 million dirhams or 22.8 percent of total investment program appropriations for the current year. This is a substantial drop from last year's appropriation of 443.7 million dirhams that accounted for about 41.1 percent of total allocations then.

The report said that this year's project appropriations for the Ministry of Electricity and Water dropped slightly to 997.9 million dirhams from 1.016 last year but that the

ministry's share of total appropriations actually increased from 21.3 percent last year to 21.4 percent. The ministry has on-going projects costing 967.9 million dirhams, of which 246.4 million dirhams are appropriated this year, compared with 413.7 billion dirhams allocated last year for project completion.

The sum of 10 million dirhams has also been allocated this year for three new projects with a combined cost of 30 million dirhams. The first involves modernizing the fueling systems of the ministry's electric stations at a total cost of 14 million dirhams, of which 3.5 million dirhams have been allocated. The second project is to modernize fire-fighting systems at the ministry's electric stations at a cost of 6 million dirhams, of which 1.5 million dirhams have been allocated. The third project involves making electrical connections to new low-cost housing units at a total cost of 10 billions dirhams, of which 5 million dirhams have been allocated for this year's work.

The cost of Ministry of Electricity and Water on-going projects rose from 736.2 million dirhams last year to 967.9 million dirhams this year of which 246.4 million dirhams have been allocated this year to cover 188.9 million dirhams for electricity and 57.5 million dirhams for water. The sum of 19.8 million dirhams has been allocated to settle past payables to certain contractors and consultants. Such amounts are set aside annually in the hope of settling disputes that remain to be resolved by the courts.

The report said that the third largest allocation, amounting to 200.8 million dirhams, or 17.8 percent of total allocations for this year's investment program projects, was earmarked for new and on-going Ministry of Education projects. The total cost of these projects is put at 1.167 billion dirhams, or 25 percent of the aggregate cost of general program projects for the current year. This compares with 1.111 billion dirhams last year.

Projects of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [including those] to be carried out by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, were given the fourth highest allocation amounting to 86 million dirhams or 7.6 percent of total program project allocations for the current year. This compares with last year's figure of 92.1 million dirhams or 8.5 percent.

Project costs increased to 433.9 million dirhams from 388.4 million dirhams last year.

The Interior Ministry was given the fifth-highest appropriation. Its projects this year have been allocated 62.2 million dirhams or 5.5 percent of total allocations under the investment program. This compares with 2.9 percent last year when allocations amounted to 32.1 billion dirhams, or 4.7 percent of total program costs, compared with 366.7 million dirhams last year.

The Ministry of Communications, ranking sixth, was allocated 37 million dirhams, or 3.3 percent of this year's investment program allocations. This compares with last

year's 16.5 million dirhams, or 1.5 percent. The ministry's project costs amounted to 90.2 million dirhams, or 1.9 percent of the total cost of program projects.

The Ministry of Planning report said that the Ministry of Information and Culture ranked seventh in the volume of allocations for its projects under this year's investment program. It was assigned 34.2 million dirhams, or 3 percent of total program allocations, compared with 23.2 million dirhams last year. Project costs remain at last year's level of 111 million dirhams.

According the Ministry of Planning report on this year's investment program, appropriations to ministries, as a share of gross appropriations, dropped this year to 91.4 percent from 94.7 percent last year. The relative importance of the ministries and other agencies covered by the investment program declined in relation to their project costs from 18.7 percent last year to 14.1 percent as the relative importance of allocations climbed to 8.6 percent from 5.3 percent last year.

The Ministry of Education's project cost ratio to aggregate costs for the current year edged upward to 25 percent from 23.4 percent last year. The project cost ratio of the Ministry of Water and Electricity also climbed to 21.4 percent from 21.23 percent. The Ministry of Housing and Public Works' project cost ratio slid to 21.2 percent from 21.3 percent last year. The project cost ratio of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also dropped from 7.9 percent last year to 6.3 percent while the Ministry of Communications project cost ratio remained at last year's 1.9 percent level. The project cost ratio of the Interior Ministry climbed to 4.7 percent from 2.5 percent last year. The project cost ratio of the Ministry of Information and Culture declined from 3 percent in 1992 to 2.4 percent this year.

The ratio of Ministry of Education allocations rose this year to 17.8 percent from 17.6 percent a year ago. The allocation ratio of the Ministry of Electricity and Water skidded from 41.1 percent in 1992 to 22.8 percent this year, but the ratio of Housing and Public Works jumped from 21.9 percent last year to 31.4 percent. The allocation ratio of the Foreign Ministry declined from 8.5 percent to 7.6 percent. The allocation ratio of the Ministry of Communications rose from 1.5 percent to 3.3 percent. The allocations ratios of the Interior Ministry likewise increased from 2.9 percent to 5.5 percent and of the Ministry of Information and Culture from 2.2 to 3 percent.

REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

Ba'th, Nasirite Unionists Declare Platforms

93AE0466A London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic
14 Apr 93 p 2

[Article from Sanaa by Hamud Munsir: "Ba'th, Nasirite Unionists Declare Their Election Platforms; Emphasis

Placed on Modern Yemeni State, on Developing Military Establishment, and on Fighting Illiteracy"]

[Text] Two principal Yemeni political parties declared their election platforms. The platforms were published yesterday by the official Yemeni media in the context of the preparations that are being made for the upcoming general elections, scheduled for 27 April. The two parties that declared their platforms are the Nasirite Popular Unionist Organization, which is led by 'Abd-al-Ghani Thabit and represented in the Supreme Elections Committee by 'Abd-al-Malik al-Khilafi, chairman of the Media Committee in the Elections Committee, and the pro-Iraqi Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (of Yemen). Dr. Qasim Salam and Brigadier General Mujahid Abu-Shawarib are two of that party's most prominent figures.

The introduction to the platform of the Nasirite Unionist Party affirmed that "the party's underlying premise is pan-Arab, its approach is unionist, and its action is patriotic." It also affirmed that the party was striving to build a modern Yemeni state. Islam would be its religion; Arab would be its affiliation, and democracy would be its substance. This modern Yemeni state would have humanitarian prospects, and it would be "a state of institutions, of law and order, social justice, and independent development."

In reviewing the role that the Nasirite Popular Unionist Organization played during the previous years, the introduction to the organization's platform reminded others of the sacrifices which the organization made for the aforementioned goals. The organization sacrificed to place the republican system on a strong foundation, to stand up to injustice, and to bring about the reunification of Yemen. The platform called attention to the fact that "the death of Lieutenant Colonel Ibrahim al-Hamdi, the former president of Yemen, was one of the most remarkable and notable sacrifices made by the party for that cause."

The party's platform called upon Yemeni voters to vote for its candidates so they could work together to build the modern Yemeni state. The Nasirite platform placed emphasis on the main, central points, which included the political, economic, military, administrative, social, and legislative aspects of the platform.

The political aspect of the platform stressed the protection of liberties and human rights and the movement of democracy from the realm of being a slogan that is proclaimed for consumption to that of genuine practice, a realm where democracy is exercised to build constitutional institutions, to further political party pluralism, to enhance the peaceful transfer of power, and to establish trade unions and organizations.

The Unionist platform placed emphasis also on the achievement of national accord and on the removal of all vestiges of the past and of political conflict, as well. It placed emphasis on providing a climate which would be conducive to the establishment of national alliances by means of candid and responsible dialogue. Emphasis was

placed on intensifying the role of the media so they could develop proper awareness among the people and reveal the facts to them. Emphasis was also placed on making the effort to develop Yemen's relations with Arab and Islamic countries and to develop international cooperation.

The economic aspect of the Nasirite Unionist platform called attention to the fact that the party had adopted the stance of reconsidering the government's fiscal and monetary policy, supporting an end to all forms of wasteful spending by the government, and setting up a mechanism that would ensure the independence and immunity of the Central Bank. The platform promised an end to price manipulation, and it promised to promote investment and to fight corruption, financial and administrative mismanagement, and the misuse of public funds.

The platform affirmed its support for the corrective financial and administrative committees that were introduced as an experiment in the mid-1970's during the administration of former President Ibrahim al-Hamdi. It also affirmed its support for reviving the national cooperative experiment for development, whose role in bringing about rural development was obvious. The platform supported the notion of applying the [standards of] accountability to all state leaders, and it encouraged the initiative of taking corrupt leaders to court pursuant to the rule of legal accountability.

In addressing the subject of local government the Nasirite Unionist platform placed emphasis on citizens' right to choose governors, provincial administrators, and directors of local government boards to ensure that the foundation of popular participation is broadened. The platform placed emphasis on citizens' right to regulate the relationship between the institutions of local government and the state's central agencies.

The platform spoke in strong terms about rebuilding the armed forces and paying attention to armed forces personnel and to improving their living conditions. It spoke of the universal application of the social security system, and it spoke of providing security and stability by dealing with the issues of revenge and unemployment, by bringing about social justice, free health care, and education, and by encouraging investment in these two areas. The platform spoke of paying attention to women and protecting women's rights in accordance with the values of true Islam.

The platform placed emphasis also on bringing about a just and independent judicial system, on prescribing the supremacy of law and order, and on making all the powers and their executive agencies subject to constitutional law. Legislation that would set term limits for those who serve in high political positions in the state and allow no one to serve more than two terms was also emphasized.

On the other side, but still concerning the election platforms of the national parties in Yemen, the pro-Iraqi

faction of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Yemen also announced its elections platform. The party stated in its platform: "The Ba'th Party does not rely on miracles, but it does rely on striving and working hard to establish a law and order state and a constitutional state." The platform affirmed that it saw Arabism as "an entity with a Muslim soul."

The platform of the Ba'th Party, which is led by Lieutenant Colonel Mujahid Abu-Shawarib and Dr. Qasim Salam al-Sharajbi, affirmed that the party would work for the following goals:

- To protect unity and democracy; to bring about social justice; to remove all the vestiges and the material and moral manifestations of the partitioning of the country; to strive for the establishment of a modern military establishment; to standardize and develop school curricula; to expand the state's activities in fighting illiteracy; and to enhance the democratic approach as a requisite to completing the task of building the state.
- To work on the application of the system of local government in a manner that would advance national unity; to fight fraud and all forms of deception and abuse of the people's resources; to fight unemployment and inflation; to resist high prices, injustice, and exploitation; to fight bribery, corruption, embezzlement, and theft of public funds; to apply the principle of reward and punishment in the state's various agencies; to place the right man in the proper job; to bring about administrative and financial reform; and to try to develop the courts so as to guarantee their independence.
- To remove all the manifestations of conflict and economic crises and to dedicate the country's various resources to serve the programs of general national development.
- To become engaged in developing and modernizing the armed forces and the security forces; to provide all the requirements for defending the country's sovereignty; to protect security; to intensify the role that the Yemeni Republic will play on the pan-Arab stage to champion the causes of the Arab nation; and to establish relations of equality with the countries of the world so as to realize the common interests of free nations.
- To reject hegemony and the unilateral control of one superpower over the world's resources, over the United Nations Organization, and over the UN Security Council; to resist colonialist policies and to strive to bring about a new economic world order which would bring an end to the unfair domination of the countries of the South by those of the North; to bring about justice in dealing with countries of the Third World so they can realize sound economic development; to reduce the burden of indebtedness; and to liberate the people of Third World countries from their compulsory subordination to foreigners at the expense of their own sovereignty and independence.

BANGLADESH

Nation Said Moving Toward Islamic Fundamentalism

93AS0752A Calcutta THE TELEGRAPH in English
29 Mar 93 p 8

[Article by Suhas Chakma, former executive director of Amnesty International's Indian chapter: "Long Arms of Mullahs"]

[Text]

Bangladesh is in Danger of Being Completely Swamped by Islamic Fundamentalism

Noorjehan, standing in a knee deep ditch with her face covered by the *aanchal* of her saree had none but Allah to look up to as she was being stoned 101 times. The Press Trust of India reported this incident on January 24, 1993 from Dhaka.

Twenty two year old Noorjehan who belonged to Chhatakchara, an obscure poverty stricken village in eastern Bangladesh, committed suicide unable to stand the ignominy of the punishment inflicted on her by a gram italsalishi—village court. The punishment followed the *fatwa* of an imam of a mosque on January 10.

The Noorjehan incident is not an aberration in the poverty stricken villages in rural Bangladesh. It is symptomatic of the pernicious features of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. It was the former president, Zia ur Rahman, who paved the way for the rise of fundamentalism with the introduction of the word Allah in the constitution through an amendment.

In 1988 General H. M. Ershad, through the eighth constitutional amendment, declared Islam the state religion relegating other faiths to subservient positions. This move erased the last traces of secularism from Bangladesh. One and a half decades of military rule gave ample opportunity to communal forces to pursue politics based on religion.

Interestingly, the Bangladesh parliament passed a resolution on January 20 this year urging India to rebuild the Babri shrine to "restore communal harmony, peace and stability in the region." The move was an indication of the growing influence of fundamentalists and rightwing groups in Bangladesh politics.

The power and influence of fundamentalists have increased to such an extent they can challenge old established parties like the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party. A host of rightwing parties such as the Jamaat i Islami have accused the Awami League of being infidels and Indian collaborators. The League's disastrous performance in the 1991 general elections was due to such campaigns.

The Jamaat which is the largest Islamic organisation in Bangladesh, denounces democratic systems of the West

and is committed to transform this impoverished nation of 120 million people into a theocratic state dictated by the laws of the shariat. It vociferously propagates the view all that is wrong in Bangladesh can be cured by the imposition of Quranic laws on believers and non-believers alike.

There are at least 5000 Jamaat run madrasas in Bangladesh. These religious schools are a breeding ground for Islamic extremism and provide fresh recruits to the Jamaat. Madrasa students form the backbone of the Jamaat's militant youth wing, the Islamic Chhatra Shibir.

Attacks on religious institutions of minorities are nothing new. The Ayodhya demolition provided an opportunity to whip up anti-minority frenzy in Bangladesh and mobilise opinion against the democratic and progressive forces which sympathise with the minorities.

Hindu temples and shrines were destroyed and looted by fundamentalists in the wake of the Babri demolition. There have been allegations from the Hill Students Council that tribal girls are being forced to wear *burqas* in the Ramgarh areas of the CHT [Chittagong Hill Tracts].

There are no provisions for protection of minorities in Bangladesh constitution. The constitution also allows the citizens to proselytise. Successive governments have succumbed to pressures of fundamentalists and not done anything to safeguard the minorities.

Garos, Khasis and the Santhals of Mymensingh and Sylhet have gradually been assimilated into the mainstream culture of Bengali Muslims. Similar cultural cleansing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts triggered an armed conflict between the government and the Jana Samhati Samiti and its militant wing, the Shanti Bahini.

Bangladesh can never claim to have an unbiased attitude towards its minorities. Allegations of atrocities on minorities and human rights violations by international organisations are perceived as interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs.

Strangely, the country has been a signatory to various international covenants and protocols on human rights. Protecting human rights and the interests of minorities is as much a national concern as an international one.

The rise of fundamentalists and extreme rightwing groups shows the growing polarisation and insecurity among the minorities. Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Ahmediyas—the minority Islamic sect which constitutes nearly 14 per cent, form the minority population.

Progressive and democratic forces have two options before them. They can either check the rise of fundamentalist forces in the interest of the minorities or succumb to the might of the extreme right and the fundamentalists to encourage more incidents like Noorjehan's tragedy. Begum Khaleda Zia has to decide whether Bangladesh is to be ruled by the law of the land or the *fatwas* of imams and maulanas.

ITTEFAQ Views U.S. Bill on Prohibition of Child Labor

BK2004095393 Dhaka DAINIK ITTEFAQ in Bengali
11 Apr 93 p 5

[By Zahiduzzaman Farooq]

[Text] The United States will not import commodities from countries which employ child labor in their industries. The Senate and the House of Representatives have moved to enact a law in this regard. This bill was introduced in the senate on 18 March by Senator Harkin. It aims at prohibiting child labor and banning imports from countries which use child labor. While moving this bill entitled Child Labor Deterrent Act 1993, Senator Harkin in his speech gave a detailed picture about the condition of child laborers in different countries of the world, particularly in Bangladesh.

Senator Harkin said that lakhs of children 6-15 years old work under inhuman conditions worldwide. These malnourished children who work for 60 hours a week in glass factories, metal workshops, textile industries, and mines are ill-paid.

Quoting ILO [International Labor Office] statistics, Mr. Harkin said that there are about 20 crore child labors throughout the world. He said at this age these children should have gone to schools instead of working in mills and factories. About 11 percent of these child laborers are in Asia, 17 percent in Africa, and 12-20 percent in Latin America. In Mexico, about one crore children are illegally employed in industries.

Mr. Harkin said that a decision should be made to ban imports from countries which employ child labor. The senator further added that he is firm in getting this law enacted. He said the garment industries of Bangladesh employ about 60,000 child workers. Quoting a Catholic nun who visited a garment factory in Bangladesh in 1992, the senator said that over 60 percent of the total 500 workers of this factory were below the age of 13. These children told the nun that the factory management deducted three days of their salary for each day of absence from work due to illness or any other cause.

The senator further mentioned that the United States imports 30 percent of the total garments produced by Bangladesh. But he admitted that the conditions of child workers in the carpet industries of Nepal, Pakistan, China, and India are no better than in Bangladesh.

He said that according to a 1991 ILO report about 50,000 children work in the carpet industries of Pakistan. A majority of these children are malnourished and suffer from various diseases. Citing a report published in THE NEW YORK TIMES, the senator said that between three to 10 lakh children work in the carpet industries of India. On an average these children have to work 12 to 16 hours daily. The senator further said that the United States imports about 40 percent of the total carpets exported by India. In the northern region of India these

children mostly work as slaves. Children working in the carpet industries are beaten with cane for working slowly and the doors of the mills are kept locked to prevent them from fleeing.

It is undeniable that a majority of the developing countries use child labor in their industries. In Bangladesh, for instance, the condition of child workers in garment or other industries is better than the boys and girls who live in the rural areas of the country. There are many families in the cities and villages whose one day's meal is earned by these child laborers. Besides, there is very little opportunity for free education of children in the primary schools of our country.

This bill has exposed the double standard of the developed countries. They claim to be champions of the cause of economic development of the developing countries. At the same time they make efforts to impose ban on imports from some of these countries under the pretext of child labor.

In the United States and other developed countries, school children are encouraged to take part-time jobs during their holidays. Is this not child labor? Historical records show that in the 1853, 1857, and 1877 children in the age group of 10-15 years had to work for 11 hours daily in the United States. The book entitled "Main Problems of American History" (Vol 2) preserved in the U.S. Library of Congress says that even seven-year-old children worked in factories for ages before the United States became economically developed. Children in the age group 10-15 years had to work in many industries of Massachusetts for their survival. This book further says that in many industries about 25 percent of the total workers were children.

Many critics say that this bill relating to the prohibition of child labor is a new policy of the United States to prevent entry of goods produced by the developing countries in their market. They are of the opinion that this problem of child labor should be resolved taking into consideration the reality prevailing in the developing countries and efforts should be made to give more access to the products of developing countries in the world market.

BHUTAN

Refugees Continue To Flee to Nepal, India

Nepalis Losing Patience

93AS0753A Calcutta SUNDAY in English 6 Mar 93
pp 20-21

[Article by Avirook Sen: "The Nowhere People"]

[Text]

Nepali Refugees From Bhutan Spark Off a Repatriation Dispute Among the Neighbours

No, it wasn't a pretty face, and it would never be. The ministrations of perverted policemen had assured that, leaving their mark in raw, gaping wounds on the cheeks that almost forced you to turn away. But it wasn't an ordinary face, it was a face that told a story—the story of southern Bhutan.

Bahnumaya Gurung, whose ugly scars were caused when boiling water was poured over her by Bhutanese securitymen, is just one of the 1,00,000 or so Bhutanese of Nepali origin who have left their homes because of persecution—or fear of it. Almost, 75,000 of them now live in crowded camps in Jhapa and Morang, in eastern Nepal, depending totally on the dole from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Evacuees from the dragon kingdom started trickling into Nepal through India as early as 1980. A census exercise carried out in 1987-88 categorized most of them as "non-national economic migrants" from across Bhutan's southern border with India. And with the overzealous implementation of the Driglam Namzha (code of conduct and etiquette)—in an effort to maintain and preserve Drukpa traditions—life became difficult for the ethnic Nepalis of the south. The Drukpas are concentrated in the north of the country and form the ruling elite.

"We cannot afford to play host to so many non-nationals because we are not a rich country," says Dawa Tsering, the Bhutanese foreign minister. "They have already claimed a sizeable portion of the resources that were meant for genuine Bhutanese citizens so we had to draw the line somewhere."

The people in the camps in Nepal are all "non-nations," according to the line taken by Thimphu. King Jigme Wangchuk himself has made the matter more complex by saying that the refugees are, in fact, all from India. "The refugees are not genuine citizens of Bhutan, there is a belt of predominantly Nepali population all along the south of Bhutan and they are mostly from there," said Dawa Tsering, clarifying the King's reported remarks.

Records maintained by the UNHCR and the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), however, show that 97 per cent of them were able to produce some document to prove that they were domiciled in Bhutan. Says UNHCR programme officer Veerapond Vongvarotai: "They either had their citizenship cards or land/property receipts or birth certificates and we were extremely strict while verifying the credentials."

But the Bhutan government is far from convinced. And this has led to the present impasse over the repatriation of the displaced people. It had seemed, during Dawa Tsering's recent visit to Kathmandu, that a solution was at sight, at least at the SAARC [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation] summit, which was to be held

in Dhaka. But the cancellation of the Dhaka summit has once more rendered the fate of the refugees uncertain.

Is the SAARC the only forum for talks? Not quite. The problem can be solved bilaterally, but there seems to be a complete lack of political will. Bhutan is firm in its conviction that the refugees are "non-nationals" and hence they are not its headache. Nepal, however, seems desperate to talk: "We are a poor country," says Nepalese home minister Sher Bahadur Daupa, "we cannot afford to support such a large refugee population much longer. We must solve this problem as soon as possible through dialogue."

One perception in Bhutan is that it is, in a way, beneficial for Nepal to give asylum, to the refugees. The country, they say, is providing only the land, while all the funds are coming from abroad and in hard currency. "It is bringing in foreign exchange, generating jobs, even the roads are being improved. So it seems only in their interest to have these people there," argues Dawa Tsering.

Thimphu has also criticised Nepal for harbouring Bhutanese "anti-nationals." Many persons wanted by the Bhutanese government are currently in Nepal. Bhutan, for instance, want Bhim Subba and R. B. Basnet, both belonging to the newly-formed Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), extradited. They face charges for embezzlement.

The Nepalese side, however, maintains that the only acceptable solution to the crisis is the "safe and honourable return of the refugees." "But how can that be possible without sweeping changes coming over the human rights situation in Bhutan?" asks Kishor Rai, general secretary, HUROB.

The recent Amnesty International report on Bhutan, however, hasn't helped the cause of human rights activists in or from the dragon kingdom. "It has become clear after the investigations carried out by Amnesty International that the reports of atrocities were grossly exaggerated," claims Dawa Tsering.

Ditto with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which had come to inspect prison conditions. "They were surprised. They hadn't expected such excellent prison conditions," says home secretary Jigme Thinley, admitting that they were upped fairly recently though.

But there is still widespread scepticism, especially in Nepal, as to whether the two bodies were given the whole picture. Bhutan's lack of proper communication facilities and the absence of a free media make it difficult to take a close look at the country.

Meanwhile, Bhutan People's Party (BPP) that has come to be associated with the pro-democracy movement in Bhutan. Most BPP leaders are frequent visitors to Kathmandu, where popular sentiment is in their favour.

But both the BPP and the BNDP are looking not so much at Nepal as towards India for genuine political support.

So far, India has not given any indication that it is going to oblige. Bhutanese refugees are not being given asylum in India. They say that Indian security forces wouldn't even allow them to camp the night on their way to the Nepal border. And during King Jigme's recent visit to New Delhi, the Indian Prime Minister assured him that the Indian soil would not be used for any anti-Bhutanese activities.

Even the Nepalese appeal to India hasn't yielded any results. "We want India to use its good office and help settle the dispute," says Sher Bahadur Daupa. But Rao had made it clear during his visit to Nepal that the issue should be settled bilaterally.

"It is impossible to believe that the largest democracy in the world will tolerate a regime like King Jigme's right under its very nose. Yet, India seems to be doing exactly that," laments a BPP spokesman.

D.N.S. Dhakal, general secretary of the BNDP is a little more optimistic: "India is going to act sooner or later, because it is her moral and intellectual responsibility towards the people of Bhutan, and definitely in her best interest," he says.

External affairs ministry sources in Kathmandu say that if the refugee crisis is not solved fast, Nepal will take it up in the international fora. "India is supposed to guide Bhutan on foreign policy as per the treaty of 1949, and may find that she is being held responsible should the issue be internationalised," says Dhakal.

Seeking Western Support

93AS0753B Calcutta *THE TELEGRAPH* in English
7 Apr 93 p 5

[Article by Wasbir Hussain: "Bhutan Dissidents Seek West's Support"]

[Text]

New Campaign After Amnesty Clears Druk Government

New Delhi, April 6: After lying low for a while, Bhutanese dissidents have once again sought to draw international attention to the plight of the minority Nepalese community in the Dragon Kingdom and its "far from satisfactory" human rights situation.

In its renewed bid to internationalise the issue, the Bhutanese anti-monarchy leadership, which is on exile in Nepal, appears to have received Kathmandu's covert support.

According to diplomatic sources, a detailed "aide memoire," tracing the genesis of the problem in Bhutan and

the resultant migration of the kingdom's Nepali-speaking people into Nepal was circulated among representatives of Western nations attending the annual meeting of the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva last month. The sources, however, remained silent on whether the aide memoire was circulated by Nepali government officials, private individuals or by groups supporting the pro-democracy stir in Bhutan.

The aide memoire, a copy of which has been obtained by *THE TELEGRAPH*, states that the presence of over 75,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees in Nepal was beginning to have a telling impact on the country's economy.

"Although the number of asylum-seekers from Bhutan has, of late, come down to a daily average of 96, this trend is indicative of the fact that Bhutan nationals of Nepalese origin are still fleeing their homeland and seeking asylum in Nepal, which means that this will further aggravate the already fragile economy," the aide memoire said. It will also destabilise the socio-cultural and the environmental setup of Nepal, it added.

Nepal says it had been providing shelter to the "fleeing Nepalis" from Bhutan on humanitarian grounds. But, of late, it appears that the Nepalese government would like the 75,000 refugees in the six camps to return home. Kathmandu has also proposed a joint survey with Bhutan, if necessary, with the involvement of Indian and UNHCR representatives to dispel doubts on the citizenship status of refugees living in Nepal.

Bhutan's alleged silence on this proposal has made Nepal accuse it of adopting "evasive tactics." Denying such a charge, Bhutanese officials said during the past 15 months, there had been eight high-level meetings between the two governments, including meetings between King Jigme Singhye Wangchuk and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala in Colombo last year and between Bhutan foreign minister Dawa Tshering and Mr Koirala during the NAM [Nonaligned Movement] summit in Indonesia. "How could anyone accuse us of adopting evasive tactics although nothing concrete has emerged out of these contacts."

Bhutanese pro-democracy agitators, led by the Bhutan People's Party (BPP) seem to have intensified their bid to garner Western support to their cause in view of the virtual clean chit given to the royal government by Amnesty International.

Amnesty has "welcomed" the steps taken by the Bhutanese government to improve the kingdom's human rights situation although it stressed the need for enactment of national legislation to ensure "foolproof safeguards" against violation of human rights.

Bhutanese exiles have also brought up the refugees issue at a recent human rights meet in Bangkok.

IRAN

Privatization, Inflation, Investment Discussed

93AS0688A London AL-MAJALLAH in Arabic
17 Feb 93 p 24

[Article: "Iranian Economy: Financing Problems Impede Private Investment"]

[Text] When the new Iranian budget is announced in March 1993, which marks the end of the Iranian fiscal year, it is not anticipated that economic conditions will have improved a great deal over last year. Inflation is officially 19.6 percent, but unofficial and foreign estimates range between 25 and 30 percent. Moreover, the hard currency crisis, which last year caused foreign banks to suspend all Iranian letters of credit, still continues despite the Central Bank's intervention. Short-term trade debt accumulations currently amount to \$3 billion.

The Iranian rial, with its various rates and multiple prices vis- a-vis free currencies, also hampers all official Iranian efforts to open investment and trade doors, and open up world markets, especially Western industrial nations. The U.S. dollar is officially valued at 70 rials, but the government applies this rate only to basic food and drugs. It does business at another rate of 600 rials to the dollar for industry requirements. The commercial market rate on Tehran streets is 1,500 rials to the dollar.

The Iranian Government finds it extremely difficult to unify the exchange rate out of fear of an enormous wave of inflation that might set off popular strikes, such as occurred last summer in the main Iranian cities to protest living conditions. However, the government is committed to the International Monetary Fund to unify the exchange rate as a start toward a program of economic reform, which would qualify Iran for support of its balance of payments. March 1994 is the deadline for Iran to implement the single rate for the rial.

Despite the fact that Iran has huge resources, as the second largest source of oil in the OPEC area, with production averaging 3.5 million barrels per day, the deficit gap widens year after year because of the import bill. It is expected that Iran's profits from the sale of oil, for the fiscal year ending in March 1993, will rise to \$20 billion. However, the bill for imports will reach \$28 billion, as the average estimate. This was the cause of Iran's difficulties with foreign banks during the past two years. Attempts to reduce imports or increase income have not, so far, produced radical results.

During last year, Rafsanjani's government embarked on steps for radical economic reforms, to transform Iran into a liberal nation vis-a-vis foreign investors. These investors have not as yet, however, flocked to available opportunities in Iran, waiting until the real dimensions of risks become clear and the Iranian economy proves that it has passed through the bottleneck.

At the present time, the Iranian Government provides, at least from the legal, theoretical aspect, several advantages for foreign investors, including:

- Lifting all restrictions on foreign investment in Iran
- Abolishing the maximum percentage permitted to the foreign partner (which was 49 percent) of the invested amount. This limit was 35 percent during the shah's time.
- Freedom for foreign partners to invest their capital at the rial's floating (i.e., free) rate, as well as to convert profits at this rate.
- Issuing of guarantees by the Iranian Government against nationalization.

It is clearly apparent that, during the 1990's, Iran will move toward encouraging the private sector, especially after the announcement by Minister of Economy and Finance Mohsen Nurbakhsh, with regard to transferring 300 companies to the private sector from government ownership. However, he did not confirm that interest in this sector might go beyond these limits, to circles of foreign businessmen and investors.

Eradicated Diseases Reappearing

93LA0025F London KEYHAN in Persian 8 Apr 93 p 2

[Text] The disease called boils, which had not been seen in Iran for decades, has recently become common once again in some areas of the country. The province of Ilam has been attacked by the boil microbe in recent months more than other regions of Iran.

Dr. Mas'ud Borzu'i, in charge of fighting malaria in the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, said in this connection: In the province of Ilam, members of several families have all been infected by the boil disease. Dr. Borzu'i blames the spread of boils in Ilam on lack of hygiene, filth in public places, failure to collect garbage in the city, and the existence of stray dogs. Dr. Borzu'i warned that if sufficient treatment steps are not taken as soon as possible to eradicate boils, this microbe will soon spread throughout the country.

In recent years, many of the diseases that had been eradicated with much effort in the past 30 years, such as malaria, ringworm, leprosy, trachoma, and Malta fever, have returned to haunt Iranians once again.

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